

NEW WORLDS

— PROFILES —

Lan

Wright

St. Albans



Asked for some comments on his current 'Profile' (his first appeared in November 1954) Lan Wright states: "One thing I have learned in almost twenty years as a writer of good, average but never—I hope—poor stories, is that the longer a story is the easier it is to write if the basic plot is a good one. In a novel there is more space to develop theories and ideas; a short story must, inevitably, become the vehicle for one basic idea, but a full length story can explore several different concepts at the same time.

"I believe this is probably the main reason why so many authors graduate from short stories to novels, although the latter market is far more limited and publishers can afford to only choose the best. However, once you have written a novel the limited scope of the short story seems cramped.

"Part of the enjoyment in being a writer is in the pleasure to be found in creating a scene, peopling it with characters, and moving the whole thing around like pieces on a chess board. Graduating from short stories to novels is like changing from draughts to chess—once you have done it you may make an occasional excursion back to the former but the fascination of the greater always overshadows the lesser.

"I write for pleasure as much as for profit and, as a result, I write stories that give me great enjoyment in the writing. If my second novel "A Man Called Destiny" which you are now reading gives as much reader-pleasure as the first one—"Who Speaks of Conquest"—then my job will have been well done and *New Worlds* will earn a lot more well deserved credit for its publication."

NEW WORLDS SCIENCE FICTION

No. 79
VOLUME 27
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INSECURITY RISK
Dan Morgan

THE UNBEATEN TRACK
Brian W. Aldiss

**FOR THE COLOUR
OF HIS HAIR**
Arthur Sellings

IN GRATITUDE
Robert Silverberg

**THE
RIGHT INGREDIENTS**
George Whitley

Serial
**A MAN
CALLED DESTINY**
Lan Wright
Part Two

Features

13th Year
of Publication



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JANUARY 1959

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No. 79

MONTHLY

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Serial :

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1958 in . . .

Over the past twenty-five years the general interest in science fiction has been marked by peaks and depressions and if one could have kept a graph it would have looked like the serrated edge of a lunar landscape. So many factors are involved that it is not possible to accurately predict when the market is likely to rise or fall although it does follow a fairly regular pattern. Until recent years these high's and low's have only applied to USA but with the international status now accorded science fiction the situation differs from continent to continent.

At the moment indications are that USA is at the bottom of a depressive trough from which it will probably not begin to recover until the winter of 1959-60. Europe has just passed a high-peak of interest stimulated by the "initial discovery" of science fiction in post-war years, is falling off but should stabilize in the upper reaches of a peak. In Britain sales have been rising out of a minor trough caused by most of the book publishers pulling out of the field in 1957, are levelling off and will probably stabilize for a time now that the field is limited. Present industrial unrest may cause a slight drop during the winter months but interest should remain in the peak section.

Meanwhile, in Australia the trend has been for a long and steady climb upward and the indications are that the peak period is not yet in sight. Internal publishing in that area has not been of a very high standard and this may have had some bearing on the slowness of development there to date although, already, the proportion of readers per capita is far higher than the equivalent in the British Isles.

Because of the American 'low' however, 1958 is a year which will not be well remembered—no major novel of outstanding worth can be recorded, in fact fewer books have been published during this year than in any for the past five. Conspicuous by their absence are new novels by our own John Wyndham and Arthur C. Clarke and Arthur informed me recently, before he left for New York, that it will be at least a year, probably longer, before he starts work on another one. One final collection of his better short stories appeared in USA—*The Other Side Of The Sky* (Harcourt, Brace, \$4.95) which has sold exceptionally well but will apparently not appear in Britain.

... Retrospect

One new Robert Heinlein novel appeared in October : *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* (Scribner, \$2.95) which was up to the author's average standard, and the fourth of his "Future History" collections appeared from Gnome Press (\$3.00) who took over the series from Shasta Publishers of Chicago.

Despite numerous anthologies and collections in USA only two are outstanding—*Fantasia Mathematica* edited by Clifton Fadiman (Simon and Schuster, \$4.95) and the Dell pocket-book *S-F: The Year's Best*, edited by Judith Merril (35c), although this latter was not up to the standard of the preceding two. Only one author-collection is worthy of note—Theodore Sturgeon's *A Touch Of Strange* (Doubleday, \$2.95) which contains several hitherto unpublished stories.

Note the price of the better quality books !

In Britain the two most outstanding books were Brian Aldiss's *Non-Stop* (Faber, 15/-) which will be published during 1959 in USA in both hard and soft covers, but which, unfortunately, is suffering from adverse criticism it does not deserve because many years ago Bob Heinlein wrote the classic long-voyage story *Universe*. Understandably, to newer readers who have never read the earlier novel, the Aldiss is building into a minor classic. Faber also record the other 'best' of the year—Edmund Crispin's anthology *Best SF Three* (15/-) which was good but not outstanding.

In the film world nothing above the moronic level appeared but there are signs that one or two worthwhile scripts now in hand might be allowed to rise above the usual comic-strip horror-suspense level. Wyndham's *Triffids* and *Kraken* are both possibles.

Despite the poor year universally, it seems that *New Worlds* has had one of the best since it was first published and we are looking forward to an equally good 1959. And, despite the high's and low's—science fiction has been with us for a long long time. There is no doubt whatsoever that it will continue to do so.

John Carnell

Many years ago American author Isaac Asimov instituted the three basic laws of robotics within which it was essential such humanoid-type machines should perform their services to Mankind. Since then those basic laws have been adopted by almost every science fiction writer and Dan Morgan uses them here to good effect in a story which combines mystery and detection.

INSECURITY RISK

By **DAN MORGAN**

Curtis was still almost a mile away, but something about the look of the place made him press his foot harder on the accelerator. The car raced along the new white concrete of the road which slashed straight as a knife-cut across the grey-green of the salt marshes. Even the seaborne wind was missing today and heavy banks of cloud clung stickily to the horizon, completing the bleakness of the October landscape.

As he drew closer to the site where the Cardington Atomic Power Station was growing out of the mud-brown shore, Curtis realised what had aroused his attention. At this hour of the day he was used to seeing the towering girder structure swarming with men and the massive construction crane swinging its dinosaurian neck, dominating all activity beneath it.

He hunched forward over the wheel, creases running from a broad nose to the corners of his heavy mouth deepening as he asked himself what sort of an accident it was that had caused a complete abandonment of all work on the site. The phone

message had told him he was wanted—nothing more. The security net round Cardington was too tight for more information to be given on a public line.

Cardington was not just a power station, it was intended as a prop which might boost the popularity of the failing government sufficiently to enable them to cling to office for yet another term. But the prop would become a club in the hands of the opposition if the rash promises of the publicity were not fulfilled. Curtis snorted, shrugging his heavy shoulders. He had little time for the scheming and propagandising of politicians—the station itself and the fact that it was providing well paid work for three hundred members of his Union in this recession year, were the important things.

He pulled to a halt at the barrier and showed his pass to a blue uniformed security guard.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Curtis. Would you go to the Site Manager’s office right away, please?”

Curtis nodded and eased the car through as the gate opened. A small temporary town had grown up inside the perimeter of barbed wire to house the men who worked on the project, with dormitories, recreation halls; even his District Union Organiser’s brain could think of no amenity or comfort within reason that was missing. And yet up ahead, where the road looped into a circle round the centre of the site, the framework of the station stood desolate and abandoned.

He stopped the car in front of the Site Manager’s office and stepped out onto the concrete. It was so quiet that he could hear the lapping of the sea at the edge of the mudflats. Slamming the car door he walked quickly into the pre-fab building.

“Fenton in?”

A male clerk who had been bending over a filing cabinet straightened quickly. “Yes, sir . . . But I . . .”

Curtis was already through the door of the inner office. Fenton was not alone, he had Darnes, the captain in charge of security guard with him. The Site Manager was a thin-featured man with neat grey hair like polished aluminium and dark rimmed glasses. On the outside he looked the typical efficient executive, but he was the kind who would quickly fall into a panic if the smooth running of routine was suddenly broken into. Even now Curtis could sense the broad cracks in the schedule-bound ego which showed in the swift movements of the man’s hands and the too jerky twist of his head as he looked up.

"Ah, Curtis! I'll be with you in a moment." He turned back to Darnes, a heavily built, balding man with the expression of one to whom all crises were just part of the job. "Very well, captain. I take it that those arrangements are quite clear to you?"

"Yes, sir—I'll go and check on things now."

"Of course, of course." Fenton's voice was too high-pitched and brittle an instrument with which to give orders and maintain the respect of those beneath him. Curtis wondered again how such a person came to be in charge of a project like Cardington. Fenton's engineering qualifications were good, but something more than technical ability was necessary when handling the co-ordination of such a large body of men.

Darnes passed Curtis, exchanging a brief nod of recognition, and left the room. Fenton walked jerkily over to the window and looked out for a moment, his chiselled profile towards Curtis. A small muscle at the edge of his thin mouth was pulsing rhythmically.

"Well, what's the trouble?" Curtis said bluntly.

Fenton turned to face him. "You must talk to the men, Curtis. I'm already two days behind schedule, and if this goes on . . ."

"I'll talk to them—when I know what I'm talking about," Curtis said. "Your message said an accident—there was no mention of a walkout."

"That came afterwards. Most of the men have always been opposed to the use of the robots, and after the accident . . ."

The robots . . . Curtis discovered that he had known it from the first moment of the cryptic phone call. There were three of them; United Robotics Corporation Multi-Purpose Humanoids, the first of their kind for field testing outside the corporation's own laboratories. Curtis himself had been against their introduction, but policy on automization was a tricky problem. A refusal to co-operate might result in the Union being accused of obstructionism and losing valuable bargaining power, and yet it could not afford to create a precedent without ensuring safeguards. Eventually the executive committee had decided that these three robots should be allowed to work on the Cardington site as a test case for future negotiations.

"They say that they will not go back to work until the robots are removed from the site," Fenton said.

That was bad. When three hundred men got an idea like that into their collective head it took a lot of shifting. Curtis had had experience of unofficial strike action before. He knew and sympathised with the antagonism of the men towards the humanoid robots, but it would nevertheless be his task to try and talk them round. "What exactly happened to involve the robots?" he asked.

The nervous tic increased in tempo as Fenton replied: "One of them went berserk and beat the skull of a crane operator to pulp. Another man struggled with it, finally managing to close in and press its emergency de-activation button."

Curtis's head seemed to sink between his heavy shoulders. This was a bad way to have his intuition about the robots proved correct. URC had given elaborate assurances of the safety factors incorporated in the humanoids. The brain of each had been implanted with the three agreed ethical directives which could not be broken and theoretically made such an incident as Fenton had described quite impossible. They were, in order of their importance, that: under no circumstances could a robot perform any action which might injure a human being; a robot should not through inaction allow any human being to come to harm, and last—a necessary survival mechanism—a robot should not allow itself to be injured so long as in taking the necessary action it would not break either of the first two directives. The Union would never have consented to the field testing of the robots if these safeguards had not been guaranteed—and now it seemed that they had been useless.

"What do URC and the Ministry say about this?" asked Curtis.

Fenton avoided his eye. "I have not considered it wise to inform anyone outside the site as yet. Such unfavourable publicity might do a considerable amount of damage to the project."

And to your own reputation if it became known that you have a strike on your hands, added Curtis mentally. This was typical of the sort of panic decision he might have expected from Fenton. "Where are the men now?" he asked.

"Most of them are in the main recreation hall, holding some kind of a meeting. You must talk to them, Curtis. We've already lost twelve hundred man hours today."

"I mean the two men who were involved in the accident," growled Curtis.

"In the sick bay," Fenton said. "Bennett, the man who

was attacked first was dead before we could reach him—the other, Read, was in a bad state of shock, but his injuries are mainly superficial according to the doctor I called in.”

“The doctor here now?”

“No—he didn’t consider it necessary to stay with Read and he gave me his assurance that he would not mention anything about the incident until it was officially released.”

“I see.” Curtis turned back towards the door. The sick bay was along the road towards the main gate.

“Where are you going?” Fenton asked sharply. “It’s most important that you speak to the men right away.”

Curtis thrust his blunt chin forward. “Right now, the most important thing I can think of is the death of a human being. I’m going down to the sick bay to talk to this Read and find out just what happened. After that I shall call in at the URC building and talk with Vane. Then, *when I know all the facts*, I’ll go and talk to the men.”

“I’ll come with you,” Fenton moved to join him.

Curtis shook his head. “No—you stop here and count your man hours. I want to get this thing straight, without any top brass pressure. Read may talk to me alone, but with you around he might be afraid to speak his mind.”

Curtis did not remember having seen the man before. But Read was not the kind of person to make a lasting impression. He sat hunched forward in the chair, his chin lowered towards his narrow chest as though trying to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. He was a small man with colourless hair and a pale face which was temporarily disfigured by a large bruise on the left cheekbone and a piece of sticking plaster over his right temple.

Curtis motioned the orderly out of the small treatment room then turned to Read with a reassuring smile. “Now, I want you to give me the whole thing in your own words, just as it happened.”

Read sat quite immobile for a moment. His greyish eyes seemed not so much to be looking through, as hiding behind the cheap steel-rimmed glasses. “I don’t want to make any trouble for anybody, Mr. Curtis.” The voice was soft and apologetic, it almost seemed to lose its way coming out of him.

“Remember, I’m on your side,” Curtis said patiently. He pulled a cigarette case out of his pocket and thrust it towards the little man.

"Thanks." Read took a cigarette and held it awkwardly as though wondering what to do with it. Curtis realised that the man must still be suffering from shock, but he had never before seen a person with so few nervous movements or gestures—it was as though the whole thing had gone inwards and been bottled up inside that slight head and body. With his faded brownish shirt and oil-stained trousers Read seemed to merge chameleonlike into the background of the chair.

Curtis gave him a light and sat back to wait. In argument or anger he had the manners of a charging elephant and the tact of a bulldozer ; but here was a man who had suffered and who needed his help.

"This robot had been with me and Ed for nearly a week. They got some idea of giving them so long on each job, I don't understand just what . . ."

Curtis nodded. "Yes, the idea was to gauge the extent of their adaptability, rather than to develop any special skills at this stage."

Read seemed engrossed in the plume of smoke rising from his cigarette. "Hmm, I reckon that must be it like you say. Real clever it was, that thing—talk too, you know . . ." The pale face with its curiously expressionless features inclined to one side and the eyes focussed on Curtis for a moment. "Why do you reckon it would go and do a thing like that? I mean, don't suppose a hunk of metal and stuff would have feelings—not like a real man, would it?"

"We don't know what a robot like that would have," Curtis said. "But we're going to have to know a darned sight more before they're allowed to work with human beings again."

"You don't like them, do you?" Read said slowly.

"No—not many people do, you know. Men don't somehow go for the idea of metal imitations of themselves walking around. Anyway, *you've* got no particular reason to be fond of them after what's happened, have you?"

"No, I suppose not. But then I'd guess that a machine like that is pretty near to a man, and men do some funny things at times when something goes wrong inside them."

"That's true," agreed Curtis. "But at least with a robot you can take it apart and see what has gone wrong. Vane will be able to find out from its brain just what happened."

"No, he won't," Read said quickly. "The de-activation button takes away all memory. Vane told me that when it is

used the robot's brain is drained of every trace and it does not know anything that has happened to it."

"You don't say!" Curtis felt a twinge of amusement at the promptness with which the little man had trotted out these technical details. "You seem to know an awful lot about them."

"I know some . . ." Read sat quite still for some time and Curtis had a strange feeling that across in the chair from him there was nothing but the husk of a man and even that might disappear at any moment in the silence.

"I don't know, Mr. Curtis," Read said at length. "I don't want to make any trouble for anyone . . . I was just walking up into the control cab, carrying a can of coffee for me and Ed, when I heard this scuffling and banging. Couldn't figure out what it was until I was inside, and there was this robot with a big spanner in its hand, standing over Ed. He was lying there on the floor of the cab, his head all bloody."

"What happened then?" Curtis asked.

"Well, there wasn't much time for thinking. The robot started to come towards me and before I knew it the thing was in between me and the door. Then it came at me and hit me with the spanner a couple of times, but my steel helmet took most of the force. Anyway, I didn't really know much what I was doing, except I remembered what Vane had told us about the red button on its chest. So I tried to reach that as quickly as I could. It was hitting at me all the time, but I was too close into it and I pressed the button. Then it went dead and after a minute I came out of the cab and yelled for help. I guess that's about all there is to it . . ."

Curtis visualised that moment of horror in the closed cab of the giant crane, with the robot standing over the mangled body of its first victim, then moving inexorably towards its second. Although they had been made only five feet tall for sound psychological reasons, the humanoid robots were physically much stronger than the average man. Read must have courage and intelligence to tackle such an opponent.

"I see," Curtis said. "Thanks for your help."

"You're going to tell the other men to get back to work?" Read asked. "They didn't ought to be loafing around, not when there's the job still unfinished . . ."

"Yes—I'll get them back as soon as I can. But first I want to be quite sure of my facts."

Read rose to his feet, his narrow shoulders hunching, birdlike. "If there's anything you want me to do to help . . ."

Curtis's heavy face cracked into a smile. "You just take care of yourself, son. Everything's going to be all right."

Curtis walked along the road towards the URC building. It had begun to rain now, and a steady drizzle fine as the spray from an atomiser seeped underneath his collar and into his eyes. But Curtis hardly noticed it, he was too deep in thought. Theoretically the robots were foolproof, but somewhere something had gone wrong. It might be one chance in a million, but it was enough to bring out the superstitious fear that was latent in the minds of men when faced by robots patterned on themselves. He knew these men; good solid characters most of them, not the kind who woke up screaming in the night for their mothers. But this was not some obscure, imagined fear; they had seen the results of the robot's attack with their own eyes. The memory of the battered corpse of one of their own workmates would not be dismissed from their minds with smooth talk.

He rounded the corner and came face to face with a shortish man with curly blonde hair. Harry Quinn, the chief shop steward on the site.

"Hallo, Bob. I just heard you'd arrived."

"Where are the men?" Curtis asked.

"Most of them are in the recreation hall."

"Good—keep them there. I shall be along to talk to them soon."

"I'd take it easy if I were you. They're in a nasty mood. I've tried to get them back to work, but one or two of the hot-heads like Gornall and Nathan have been needling things and they won't listen to me."

"What do they hope to gain by staying away from the job?"

"They say that they won't carry on until the robots have been removed from the site. Fenton didn't make matters any better by trying to force them back straight after the accident, shouting his head off and issuing orders all round. Bennett, the man who was killed, was pretty well liked, you know."

"Yes, I remember him. A big, beefy character with quite a sense of humour, wasn't he?"

"If you call that sort of thing humour," Quinn said. "There was a bit too much of the sadist about him for my taste."

"What do you mean?" asked Curtis quickly.

"Oh, you know the kind of thing. He was a big man and he could get away with things that anybody smaller wouldn't dare try. Take the way he used to treat Read, for instance."

"How was that?" Curtis asked.

"Well, you've seen what sort of a meek little character he is. Can't you imagine the fun a big slob like Bennett would have taking the mickey out of such a ready-made butt? It used to make me boil sometimes to see the way Read used to hang around Bennett and expose himself to that sort of thing. I suppose he must have been attached to Bennett in some strange way and didn't mind suffering as long as he could be near the man. I remember one time in the canteen when they had some new girl working behind the counter. Bennett used to rib Read in front of all the other fellows that he was sweet on her. One day he picked Read up bodily and sat him on the counter in front of the girl. All the men roared their fool heads off—but Read didn't say a thing, just took it."

Curtis nodded. "Yes, I suppose he would. But there's always a breaking point. Remind me to tell you the story about the man and the Alsation dog some time, Harry." He stopped walking and raised a big hand to his forehead, slicking away the rain. They were standing in front of the URC hut, a few feet away from the uniformed security man who stood on guard at the door. "I'm going in here to get Vane's angle on this thing. You had better go and tell the men that I shall be coming to talk to them as soon as I'm free."

"I'll do that," Quinn said. "But I'm warning you, Bob—they're not too happy about *you*, now this thing has happened. Some of them are saying that it's your fault that the robots were allowed in here in the first place, that you talked them into it."

Curtis grinned broadly. "That's fine—we might have an interesting meeting."

The lines smoothed from Quinn's troubled young face. "Yes—I expect you'll handle them O.K. How long do you think you'll be?"

"Ten . . . twenty minutes, maybe. It won't do them any harm to stew a bit longer." Curtis headed for the door of the URC hut.

With the white-smocked figures round the table and the blinding lights the room was like an operating theatre. Save for the fact that the patient on the table was a robot. It lay

there, masses of circuitry visible through the inspection plates which had been removed from its dull silvery body. The smell of antiseptics was equated by the acrid odours of solder and oil.

Peter Vane, URC technician in charge of the robots, brushed back his untidy black hair and approached Curtis, leaving his two assistants to their work.

"I see Fenton has put a guard round you," Curtis said. "Are you expecting more trouble?"

Vane grimaced, deep lines etching themselves into his still youthful forehead. "Fenton always expects trouble, you should know that." He thrust out his hand. "How are you, Bob?"

Curtis shook the hand firmly. He liked young Vane, and had a great deal of respect for him as a scientist who believed in what he was doing. "I don't like what I hear, Peter. I've just been talking to Read."

Vane nodded wearily. "Looks bad, doesn't it?"

"The worst—the committee's decision will be thrown out for certain as soon as this thing is made known. Your humanoid robots will be poison."

"And ten years of work will go down the drain."

"Why couldn't you people be content with ordinary cybernetic tools?" Curtis asked.

"The humanoid form has been proved over fifty million years to be the most adaptable for all kinds of work. We're convinced that eventually such a robot will be able to do anything a human is capable of, with no limitations."

"Including murder?"

Vane winced. "There must be some explanation. I just can't believe a robot would short out the prime directive like that without blowing all its control mechanisms."

"According to Read it was not just frenzied manic behaviour—the thing was out to kill, in a deadly, controlled manner. Would have succeeded too a second time, if he had not managed to reach that de-activation button."

"Yes, it's a good job Read was the one who discovered the trouble. The men were all told about the de-activation button, of course, but I doubt if many of them would have had the presence of mind to use it. Bennett, for instance, must have tried to fight back rather than reach it."

"Strange little character that Read," Curtis said thoughtfully. "You say he was really keen on the robots?"

"Yes, he used to come over here quite often and sit around asking questions about the way they work. It seemed to fascinate him. Not that he could possibly understand a lot of the stuff we told him, but it was nice to feel that there was at least one person amongst the workers who was sympathetic towards what we were trying to do. You ought to do something about those Union members of yours, Bob. What makes them so insecure that they think everybody is after their jobs?"

"A man with your qualifications is hardly likely ever to find out," Curtis said. He pointed towards the table. "Are you making any progress?"

"Not so far. It will be a long job, and even then we may not be right."

"Read told me that the de-activation button clears the memory of a robot—is that right?"

"Yes—that's the devil of it. De-activation automatically drains off all power, including the tiny charges in the brain cells, meaning a loss of all memory and skills. Once activated, an H-class robot cannot be switched off unless you are prepared to re-educate it completely. Someday we may be able to do that with standard taped data, but at the moment it is a lengthy process similar to the education of a human being."

"If that is true, what do you hope to gain by examining this robot?"

"There may be some gross physical malformation, some crossing of circuits which could explain the bypassing of the prime directive."

"Is that possible?"

"I don't know, Bob. Since it happened I wonder if I know anything at all. Perhaps you were right and we're trying to go too far ahead in this business of playing God and building creatures in our own image."

"We all make mistakes," Curtis said gently. He did not like to see the youngster so discouraged, even though he himself had never shared his enthusiasm for the robots.

"But we shouldn't at this stage. Those robots were put through exhaustive tests in our laboratory before it was even suggested that they be brought out here. Believe me, Bob, URC don't take any unnecessary chances—they know how important the psychological factors are in any form of automazation."

"Good intentions . . ." mused Curtis. "By the way, what about the other two robots?"

"We called them straight in after the accident. They're in the next room now."

"You haven't de-activated them?"

"No—why should I?"

"No reason. I was just curious. But I wouldn't let them walk around outside for a while, if I were you." Curtis made for the door.

"Where are you headed for now?" asked Vane.

"To see if I can talk some sense into those Union members of mine—and to make sure that Fenton doesn't do anything darned stupid. Let me know if you get onto anything, will you?"

A narrow-shouldered figure in rain-soaked shirt and trousers walked with curious, shuffling gait towards Curtis as he left the URC building. Read walked, as he did everything else, with a minimum of fuss. There was something pathetic about the man, as though he was constantly apologising for his presence in the world. And yet in every man there must surely be some spark of self respect.

"You shouldn't be out here like this after the shock you've had," Curtis said. "Why don't you get along to your living quarters and put some dry clothes on?"

"I was . . . but I saw you go into the URC hut. What does Vane think about it?"

"He hasn't much to go on," Curtis said. "Naturally he's hoping that he will be able to uncover some fault in the robot."

Read's eyes were hidden behind his rain-spotted glasses. "Kind of a nice fellow that Vane . . . Wish there was something I could do to help. Did he say how he thought it might have happened?"

"Look, Read, do yourself a favour. You might catch pneumonia hanging around out here in the rain."

"Well, I was only thinking maybe . . ." The voice was a listless sound, like a melody played on a bad instrument by a poor musician.

Curtis heard the sound of heavy, running footsteps and looked round to see Quinn approaching.

"Hey, Bob! Now we've really got trouble. A couple of the men drove down to the main gate in a car to go into town just now, but the security police turned them back with guns. Fenton has given instructions that no one is to be allowed to leave the site."

"The darned fool!" breathed Curtis. "He can't keep three hundred men boxed up here indefinitely. Who does he think he is?"

"They're not going to take it," Quinn said grimly. "The whole mob is marching this way and they're in a first class rioting mood. I left just ahead of them."

"Right—come on!" Curtis broke into a run.

"Where are you going?" Quinn asked.

"To Fenton, of course. He's the one who issued this mad order and he'll have to countermand it."

Fenton was seated at his desk alone. He looked up irritably as the two rain-soaked, panting men burst into his office.

"Well, Curtis—have you anything to report?"

"Where the hell did you get your training in handling men—in a concentration camp?" exclaimed Curtis.

Fenton's natural pallor increased, thin lips tightening. "How dare you come in here and insult me! You Union people are all the same with your loud-mouthed bluster."

"Look, if you wanted me to settle this walk-out for you, why didn't you give me all the facts?"

"What do you mean?"

"Those police guarding the gate with guns—they didn't just grow there, did they?"

"Security . . ."

"Be damned! You can't keep these men imprisoned here. The kind of mood they're in they may wreck the whole place."

"They wouldn't dare!"

"Don't kid yourself, Fenton. I've had experience of this sort of thing before. If you don't call those police off the gate you'll not only have a strike on your hands, you'll have a riot!"

"But I *can't* allow anyone to leave the site until this matter is cleared up."

"You'll have to. Stop thinking about your precious job for a change and look at the facts. The men are on their way here right now. If you don't go out and meet them and tell them that the barring of the gate was a mistake and they're free to leave the site any time they like, anything may happen."

"I'll see you in hell first!" Fenton said indignantly. "I'm not going to be dictated to by a mob of semi-literates. I'm in charge here."

"And you'll be responsible for any damage that's done. You can't keep this quiet forever."

Quinn had moved over to the window and was looking out. "They've stopped in front of the URC building," he said, frowning.

"Why didn't I think of that?" Curtis banged his right fist into his left palm. "They must have got hold of some mad idea about destroying the robots. Vane and his assistants won't stand a chance!"

"Very pretty," sneered Fenton. "You don't fool me for a minute, Curtis. You were against the robots in the first place, weren't you? It would be convenient if they *were* destroyed, wouldn't it?"

Curtis stiffened, making a low sound in the base of his throat. Some day Fenton was going to go too far, but this was no time for personal quarrels.

"Where are they now?" he asked Quinn.

"Still outside the URC building. Somebody is talking to them, I think."

"Vane probably—but he won't be able to hold them long." Curtis headed for the door. "Come on!"

The two men rushed out of the office, leaving Fenton. In the gathering dusk outside they could see the crowd of men who stood in front of the URC building.

They were a tough-looking bunch, these construction men, many of them still wearing steel helmets and some carrying clubs and other improvised weapons. But at the moment they were silent, listening to the drably dressed figure who stood in front of the door of the building. Curtis had been in riots before, during strike periods, and he knew that it took a lot of courage to try and hold a mob back with words. It could be done, but not if you wavered or showed any sign of fear. Normally these men were decent enough, law abiding citizens, but now they were just part of the monstrous animal that was the mob. And like any mob, its characteristics would be composed of the lowest and worst in the people who formed it.

As they came closer Quinn recognised the lone speaker. "For Pete's sake! That's Read in there. Why should he, of all people, want to stop them smashing the robots?"

Curtis's heavy face was set in a solemn mask. "I think maybe he has a pretty good reason. I'm going through here, but there's no need for you to risk your neck."

"I'm sticking with you, Bob," Quinn said. The two men began to edge their way through the crowd. Men turned

angrily at the pressure of Curtis's elbow, then gave way as they saw the expression on his face.

Curtis guessed that the shock of seeing themselves opposed by such an unlikely candidate as Read had stopped the men for a moment. He could only hear vague snatches of what the little man was saying, but he knew that Read's arguments would only be sufficient to bring about a temporary pause in the activity of the mob.

But there might be another way of using the presence of Read. It was a risk, but anything was better than the possible destruction of the URC building and injury to the technicians inside it.

Pushing further into the crowd Curtis shouted, assuming an accent broader than his normal blunt tone : "Speak up, Lofty ! We can't hear you at back !"

The sudden incongruity brought the laugh Curtis had expected from several members of the crowd. They all knew Read as a butt of fun and unconsciously welcomed this release of tension.

“If he'd eat his pudden when he was younger we'd all hear him !” Curtis shouted again.

A second wave of laughter joined the first, spreading through the mob, robbing it of its destructive power as it did so. Laughing men are not dangerous in the same murderous way as a sullen mob. Read had served his purpose—now it was Curtis's turn.

Thrusting past the leaders until he reached Read, Curtis turned to face them. The laughter stopped, giving way to an ominous silence.

“Yes, you all know me !” Curtis's big voice echoed between the buildings, like a bass fog horn. “I know what's happened here and I'm on your side. But you can't solve anything by violence.”

“What about Bennett ?” shouted a thin, red-haired man in soiled dungarees.

“He's dead, and nothing you can do will make any difference to him. What do you do if a man gets injured by a bulldozer or a truck ? Do you start tearing the machine apart ? Just because there was a robot involved in this thing it doesn't make it any less of an accident.

“Believe me, we had the fullest guarantees from the government and URC that these robots were safe, or we wouldn't have consented to allow them to work here with you. But something unforeseen went wrong.”

"You mean the robot killed Bennett!" shouted the redhead. "That shows they're not safe, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps, but it is most important that we know why it acted in such a way. The URC technicians are waiting for some special apparatus from their central laboratory. When it comes they will be able to probe the memory of the robot involved in the accident and tell us exactly what happened."

"That won't bring Bennett back!"

"No," Curtis replied. "But it will at least tell us *why* he died. If there is the slightest chance of such an accident ever happening again, the Union will ban the use of the robots completely."

There was a shuffling and murmuring amongst the men as Curtis paused. He could tell by their faces that except for a very small minority of trouble-makers the heat was gone from them.

"What right has Fenton to keep us in here?" asked a squat man in the front row.

"None at all," Curtis said. "But just for tonight I want you to stay and cause no trouble. The security police have their orders and they've got a job to do, right or wrong. Fenton has handled things in the wrong way, but that is no excuse for us to behave badly. If you'll all go back to your quarters, I promise you that the whole thing will be cleared up by the morning."

They were not a mob any more, just a crowd of men who had been listening to a man they trusted. Already those at the edges were beginning to drift away into the gathering darkness. One or two old familiar faces walked sheepishly towards Curtis and offered embarrassed apologies. And then he and Quinn were standing alone beside the shaken security policeman.

"What happened to Read?" asked Quinn, looking around for the little man.

"We'll be hearing from him." Curtis began to walk back towards Fenton's office.

"I don't understand what would make a man like him stand up to a mob like that," Quinn said.

"Perhaps you will . . . later." Curtis's face was heavy and brooding.

"That business you were talking about—the special machine URC are sending down to find out what is in the brain of the robot. I hadn't heard anything about that."

"*There isn't one*," Curtis said. "I was lying—that robot is just a useless hunk of metal now."

"But the men will want to know what has happened in the morning—what will you tell them?"

Curtis looked up at the sky. The rain had stopped and the light of a watery moon was beginning to filter through the clouds. "Looks like it's going to be a fine night," he said.

Quinn glanced at him oddly, then walked silently beside him towards the Site Manager's office.

Fenton seemed to have grown smaller. He was seated behind his desk, shoulders slumped forward, the lines of his face deep etched in the cruel light of the fluorescents.

"I suppose I ought to thank you for what you did," he said brokenly. "I've handled things badly, I can see that now."

"You did your best," Curtis said gruffly. He knew how much it cost a man to climb down. It was no satisfaction to him to see Fenton grovel. Especially the way things were—he had more important things on his mind.

"I've had time to do some thinking in the last half hour," Fenton said. "Perhaps you were right about the robots in the first place. I'm going to call the ministry and tell them what has happened."

"Not yet!" Curtis said sharply.

"But you were the one who wanted it released before," Fenton said unbelievably.

"Yes, but the situation has changed. If I'm right we should be able to clear up this whole thing tonight. That's the way you wanted it, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I don't see . . ."

"You will," Curtis said slowly. He lowered his heavy body into a chair and seemed to sink within himself.

The other two men sat silently, eyeing his broad face from time to time questioningly, but not speaking. There was something about Curtis that rejected all questions in advance and there was nothing to do but sit and wait, without knowing what they were waiting for. They stayed like that whilst Curtis smoked three cigarettes, one after another.

The telephone on Fenton's desk rang, its bell cutting through the heavy air like a scalpel and making them all come erect. The Site Manager's hand reached out jerkily and carried the instrument to his ear.

"Fenton speaking."

"Darnes here," came the tinny voice from the earpiece. "I'm calling from the main gate. Someone has just crashed through in a truck. We couldn't see who it was, but he's heading out across the marsh road now. What do you want us to do?"

"Hang on a minute." Fenton placed his hand on the mouthpiece and looked towards Curtis. "I thought you had them under control out there," he whispered urgently.

"I have," Curtis said. "This is something else. Tell Darnes to forget it."

Fenton frowned, then removing his hand from the mouthpiece he said: "Carry on with your normal watch. I'll call you back later." He placed the phone back in its cradle and turned his attention to Curtis. "You know who was in that truck?"

Curtis nodded. "Yes—it was Read," he said, as though the possession of the information gave him little satisfaction.

Quinn and Fenton eyed him in astonishment.

"Why Read?" asked the Site Manager.

"Because he killed Bennett," Curtis said quietly. "He had been planning it for months, looking for some foolproof method—and the robot was his answer."

"But I don't understand," Quinn said. "You can't make a robot kill anybody—the directives . . ."

"Of course not—and it won't stand by whilst you kill somebody either," Fenton said sharply.

"Read knew all that and a lot more," Curtis said patiently. "In fact, apart from Vane's people he knew more about the robots than anybody."

"But why would he want to kill Bennett?" Fenton asked.

"I think perhaps Harry here could give us a few reasons," Curtis said. "You know the type of man Read is, withdrawn and quiet. How do you think he got that way? I remember when I was a kid there was a man in our town who kept a dog. It was part Alsatian, but it was a mangy, cowed creature and he used to whip it every day just to show it who was boss. The dog just used to stand there and take it then follow him around as though nothing had happened. Most people thought the animal worshipped him because that was the way it expected a master to treat it . . . Until one night they found the man lying in his own backyard with his throat torn out and the dog was missing."

Quinn's eyes were wide. "My God ! I believe you're right, Bob."

"I wish I weren't," Curtis said quietly.

"You mean that Read found some way of making the robot act contrary to the directives ?" asked Fenton.

"No—there is no way of doing that."

"Then how . . . ?"

"It's quite simple," Curtis said. "So simple that you might look the answer right in the eye and never notice it. Read knew a lot about people and their attitudes—he learned the hard way. He knew that if he framed the murder in this way the unconscious prejudice of all of us against robots would be working on his side, that everybody would accept his word that the robot had committed the crime quite naturally. And nobody would dream of questioning his de-activation of the robot ; assuming that he did so in self-defence, and not stopping to consider that in doing so he erased its memory so that there could be no evidence of the crime other than what he was prepared to give."

"You mean that Read erased the robot's memory after it had witnessed his killing of Bennett ?" said Fenton.

"No," Curtis said. "He was too wise to take a chance like that, the robot might have tried to stop him ; in fact it would have been almost certain to have done so according to what I understand of the directives. What really happened was that Read de-activated the robot *before he attacked Bennett*. Then, after his victim was dead he came out from the control cabin and told everybody that the robot had gone berserk. As far as he was concerned the robot was not a witness, but it *was* a ready made scapegoat."

"But if this is true, why did Read stop the men destroying the robots ?" asked Quinn.

"For the same reason that when I first saw him in the sick bay he practically apologised for being involved in the accident. Once the thing was over he wanted life to go back to the security of normal routine. He felt that if it did so there would be less chance of his crime being suspected. But I shattered that hope for him when I told the story about URC sending special equipment to probe the mind of the de-activated Robot. His whole plan was based on the impossibility of such an operation."

"But surely, you said yourself that the robot *did not* witness the crime ?" Fenton said.

"That's where Read's fixation pushed him too far, over the edge of the logic," Curtis said. "After the thing had happened he found that he still didn't feel quite secure as he had expected he would with Bennett dead. A person like Read can never be really sure of himself, that's the way he's made, with too much ingrowing imagination. He jumped to the conclusion that if what I had said was true, it was possible that the robot had continued to register what was going on around it after de-activation. That's why he has bolted."

"But I thought you were against robots," breathed Fenton. "This clears them completely."

"I still am, when we can allow one of our own kind to suffer the experiences that must have shaped the mind of Read. Who are we to create other thinking beings when we can't handle ourselves? It wasn't just Bennett he wanted to kill, it was all the people who had hurt him in one way or another throughout his whole life."

Curtis rose to his feet and walked over to the window. He stood, looking at the gaunt silhouette of the unfinished power station against the night sky.

"You'd better call the Cardington police and have them pick up Read," he said. "And tell them to be gentle with him. He's not dangerous . . . now."

Dan Morgan

Films

Leonard Wibberley's hilarious fantasy novel *The Mouse That Roared* (Little Brown, New York, 1954) will shortly be technicolour filmed in England by Open Road Films with comedian Peter Sellers playing the part of the Grand Fenwick expedition which lands in modern New York, captures America's leading scientist Professor Kokintz (played by David Kossoff) and forces the USA into losing the state of war which exists between them and the smallest country in the world—bows and arrows against atomic science!

Jean Seberg co-stars with Sellers as the feminine lead and William Hartnell of ITV's "The Army Game" series will play a leading comedy role as the hardboiled sergeant in the Army of Grand Fenwick. The book was a riot—the film should be equally as good.

The dictionary defines 'gestalt' as "an organised whole in experience" and as such the subject matter in science fiction has been used with tremendous effect by Theodore Sturgeon in his book-length novel More Than Human. Never before, however, has a short story so vividly conveyed the uniqueness of this merging of personalities as in Brian Aldiss's story below.

THE UNBEATEN TRACK

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

Just by accident, Clemperer had shaved when he got up at noon. Consequently, he was looking not too much the tramp when he drifted into his destiny at Karpenkario's, the Greek place on the waterfront, at nine in the evening.

Clemperer knew nobody at Karpenkario's place. That was its attraction for him. He was alone in the world and he knew it. He hated the bars full of false friendship, where acquaintances who had seen him only half-a-dozen times before in their lives, slapped his back and cried, "Come on, old pal, haven't seen you in a long time ; how about a drink ?" Equally, Clemperer hated loneliness. But at least loneliness was clean and honourable.

He bought a double whisky at the bar. He had already downed four elsewhere. Instead of drinking where the other people were drinking, he carried the glass with him, pushing through the crowd, which consisted mainly of sailors, and made for the quiet restaurant behind. The air was clearer here, reminding Clemperer of his stale old wisecrack about

his not being able to see unless the atmosphere was full of cigarette smoke.

Only one of the restaurant tables was occupied. A man and woman, strangers to Clemperer, sat at it.

That was the beginning of everything. Clemperer did what he never did : he went and sat down with the man and the woman, instead of choosing an empty table.

"You might like a look at the menu," the man said, handing him over a typed sheet smilingly. "Fortunately the food here is better than the typing."

It did not hit Clemperer all at once, because he was partially drunk, but the sensation he had was as if he had arrived home. That was odd : Clemperer had no home. Four years earlier, on his fortieth birthday, he had flung up the bachelor flat he had hitherto called home, and the Motivation Research job which paid for it, and had gone out into the world, wandering from town to town in search of what he privately called his destiny.

He raised the whisky, paused, lowered it again, setting the glass with ponderous care onto the table.

"Your coffee sounds good," he told the girl. "I must have a cup. It'll help to clear my head."

He had meant to say 'smells good,' not 'sounds good.' It was the sort of slight verbal slip he often caught himself making, much to his annoyance. In this case, it rudely implied that the girl was drinking noisily ; yet by her smile she appeared to have grasped his real meaning. How seldom you found anyone like that, Clemperer reflected.

He ordered a big jug of coffee, offering the others a cup, which they both accepted.

Meanwhile, he looked them over carefully. There was nothing extraordinary about them. They looked faintly unhappy. One sat one side of the table, one the other, and their hands met on the polished oak. The man was about Clemperer's age, but better preserved, obviously more prosperous. He looked as if he might still have hope. Behind his spectacles, his grey eyes held a wealth of friendliness.

The girl was more striking. She was not pretty, but neat enough to be very attractive. At a guess she was twenty-one. Her dark hair was short, without curl, while in her long, square face was set a pair of the darkest, saddest eyes Clemperer had ever encountered. In her was some unguessable grief, as thick as fog—yet *now* she was happy.

At some time, then or later, he found their names were Spring and Alice.

From the Greek waiter, he ordered a dish of Arab Kuftides, with spaghetti and chile sauce. It was not the kind of thing Clemperer usually did ; he rarely ate after mid-day—it was just throwing good food away on a bad ulcer. His current theory was to try and drown the damned thing in alcohol.

That reminded him about the untouched whisky ; he called the waiter and got it taken away.

“I’m sorry if I smell of whisky,” he said. “Once you start draining the stuff you smell of it all through. I’ll sober up soon.”

“There’s no hurry,” Spring said.

Spring did not speak much. He did not eat much, though occasionally he stirred the dish before him with his fork. Alice was stubbing out her cigarette ends in the mashed potato on her plate. Now and again she mopped her forehead with a tissue from the carton of Kleenex beside her. Both of them seemed to be . . . waiting.

‘They’re odd people,’ Clemperer thought, feeling once more that warm sensation of being home. He had been aware of his own oddity for too long.

“Drinking’s only a way of trying to get under the normal hard surface of loving,” he said apologetically. He had intended to say ‘living,’ not ‘loving,’ but again he sensed they both understood what he meant. “Some people only know that way of doing it. What I mean is, you can go right through life without really becoming intimate with another person, without really touching their identity with your identity—true identity. When you’ve stewed in drink, you at least swamp yourself in your own identity, and then you don’t need anyone else so much.”

And he thought in startlement, ‘Why the hell am I talking this sort of stuff? I’ve never talked like this to anyone, never mind to complete—’ But he could not bring himself to think the word ‘strangers.’ Whatever they were, they weren’t strangers, not now he had once met them.

“When you’re drunk or when you’re dead you don’t need anyone so much,” Alice said, seeming to do half the talking with her eyes. “But otherwise, the trouble is we none of us have true identities until we have someone to share it with—someone capable of sharing it.”

"If people would only consciously realise it," Spring said, "that's all anyone spends their life doing : looking for the right person to reveal their identity to."

"It's a hard search always," the girl went on, looking at Spring. "The compensation is that when you find that kind of person, you *know*. Nobody need say a thing. It just feels right."

"I'm really intruding on you true," Clemperer protested, not that he felt that way at all inside. His tongue had turned 'two' into 'true.'

"You know you're not," Spring and Alice replied together. "Can't you trust your instinctive responses?"

"I'm forty-four," Clemperer said, smiling wearily ; "I've grown out of the habit."

To his mild horror, he began telling them the whole story of his life. It was an ordinary enough tale, at least until the revolutionary moment four years ago, when he had entirely broken with his old way of life : a tale of continuous inner discontent. Clemperer could not stop it ; it all came bubbling out, and the grey eyes and the great black ones listened carefully to every word.

At last he finished. The uneaten remnants of his meal had grown cold ; Alice's glass was crammed full of tissues. Clemperer made a gesture of self-deprecation.

"I don't know why I tell you all this," he murmured.

"Because now you tell us," Alice said, "you see it all in a different light. You can grasp now that your life did not happen the way you thought it did at the time."

"You're right !" Clemperer exclaimed. "All my past has been heading towards *this* moment, this moment of revelation . . . This puts a meaning to it . . ."

For so much else he wished to say, he could uncover no words. He saw them all as icebergs floating on a great sea ; the sea was . . . being, having, knowing ; and under all his new happiness ran a river connecting him with them. A vast restlessness overcame him. He wanted to run, sing, wave his arms ! Here at last was a moment for which to celebrate and be alive in every cell.

"Let's go outside," Spring suggested. "Every so often I have to air my sinuses."

"That's what I was going to say," Clemperer exclaimed.

"Of course," Spring said, laughing. "It's nice to have someone to do these little things for you, eh?"

They pushed their way out into the night. A bluff summer wind blew along the sea front. The clustered dinghies rocked contentedly by the jetty. All along the harbour wall, the sea cast up its spray at the feet of the white lamp standards.

Clemperer seemed to experience neither the night nor the gale. Alice had linked herself between the two men like a catalyst, her young squaw face mysterious in shadow. She was frightening—because she was eating her heart out, and Clemperer was now part of that heart.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It's a gestalt! We're a gestalt! You know what I mean—the whole we represent is something greater than the sum of our parts. We've combined, and something has happened beyond us."

They looked at him curiously. For the first time, he had surprised them, filling their countenances with wonder. All three were conscious of saying many things in silence.

"We—Alice and I—thought we were complete until you arrived," Spring said gravely. "Directly you turned up, we realised that was not so. You are a vital part of whatever it is. You'd better try and explain your contribution."

He was so happy! He was not just the junior partner they were allowing to accompany them. They were equals: his share was one third.

"Let me tell you this first of all," he began, "although you being you, it may not need saying. Usually—in fact, up till this very evening—I was never the sort of person you are now seeing. A lot of people are different in the company of different people, but now I'm really different. Usually, I hate people—if a man or woman becomes my friend, they do it the hard way, the barriers have to go down one by one, and there are lots of barriers. You two by-passed all of them, somehow. And another thing, at this time of night, the acute pain-joy of living flares up in me . . ."

"We're all Night People here," Alice interposed gently.

". . . and so I generally arrange to be well stewed by now, to keep the voices out. Usually I have an odd impediment in my speech, sort of a Freudian slip, which has now completely left me, as if my old brain cogs have got their teeth back in. I have stopped saying the wrong words—I've found locks I want my keys to fit. Then, for another thing, I heartily

distrust mysticism, emotion or any such clack as I—we—are now talking. It's suddenly no longer clack : it's the one real thing I've ever known, to be walking here with you."

"Of course you're surprised," Spring said. "It is surprising. It's staggering ! When it first happened to Alice and me, we thought it was just love. (Why that 'just' ?) Now you come along and prove it's something more again."

"... as we had begun to suspect," Alice concluded. It was dreamlike the way they each supplemented the other's meaning. "Tell us about the gestalt. Expand and expound."

"I've never been content because I've only just stumbled on you," Clemperer said. "Maybe all discontented persons in the world are just waiting for their Stumbling Time . . . I can feel—I can feel that we three are a big thing, bigger than three people ; we are in some way aloof from time and space. As you said, this meeting has had the power to alter my past ; probably it can alter our future, too. This thing has never been described. It's not telepathy, for instance, although feeling alike we shall obviously think along similar lines. It's not a *menage a trois* or what's usually implied by the term, although basic sexuality may provide some of the binding force. If it has been found before, the finders have kept quiet about it. We are treading what is virtually a new trail, an unbeaten track. We can't know where it leads . . . until we arrive."

He went on talking, elucidating for the benefit of all, carried away by his vision. As they strolled along the windy front, the lights overhead seemed to float by like suns, each casting its starlight slowly on their faces.

At last Clemperer broke off.

"It's very late," he said, suddenly apologetic again. "You know, it's amazing how I seem to know all the important things about the two of you, but none of the trivial ones which everyone sets such store by. Don't you want to get home or something now ?"

"We be but poor holiday-makers, sire," Spring said, with an odd mock-lightness. "Our homes are far apart."

He pointed over the dark sea, where a yacht lay at anchor, its lights rocking gently with the swell.

"See the yacht ? Our berths are there. Alice and I only met because a mutual friend—the owner of the yacht—invited us for a cruise round the coast with several other people. I

think we will stay ashore tonight ; we can board first thing in the morning ; they won't worry about us . . . and someone there will look after my wife."

Those last few quietly spoken words told Clemperer everything he needed to know about the pool of sorrow in Alice's eyes ; the subject was not referred to again between them.

"Karpenkario's stays open all night," Clemperer said simply.

They walked back in silence, a weird, loud silence which felt more important than all the talk. Occasionally, Alice would use a tissue on her forehead ; letting it go, she would watch it sail bravely away on the increasing wind—along, round and up, right over the roof-tops of the poor houses which faced the sea.

At Karpenkario's, they managed to get a small back room. It contained a card table, chairs and litter on the floor ; but it was better than going back to Clemperer's room. He had deliberately not suggested that. A vision of its unmade bed, the empty whisky bottles peering blindly from the ever-open wardrobe, the clothes on the floor, a pat of butter festering on the wash-basin, rose before him, provoking only a sad smile from him. All that belonged to the aimless past. He could no more have taken Alice and Spring there than a snake could resume its sloughed skin.

They ordered coffee and began to talk again. Endless talk, the river running swift and sure beneath it.

The gestalt became more intense as the night wore on, till it seemed to envelop them like a collapsed tent, almost smothering them. Outside, the wind howled and banged down a side passage, sounding dustbins and charging loose doors, lamenting over rooftops. It grew to symbolise for them the new power lurking just beyond their conscious thresholds, until it seemed that within themselves there might be a force which could whip away their self control like straw—for ever.

They became slightly afraid. But chiefly they were afraid because they no longer knew what they represented, and their old, safe selves had been lost eternally on the midnight tide.

"This gestalt," Alice said, at one point in time. "What do you think we can *do* with it?"

"Or what is it able to do with us?" added Spring.

"Is it a force of good or evil?" asked Clemperer.

"I think it is beyond good or evil," the girl said, peering down squaw-faced into the depths of some unimaginable well. "Whatever it may be, it is beyond all the laws and rules. What's usually called . . . supernatural . . ."

Now it was as if they were frozen together. Tired, cold, vitiated, they sprawled closely across the table, moving no more than the patient alligator which awaits its prey. They looked like bundles of old clothes.

"There's something we—it—can do," Clemperer said. "I can feel it, but I can't define it."

"Its only function is to bind us always," Spring said, almost sharply, "to hold us together wherever we are, whatever happens. And what could be more valuable?"

"We are Night People," the girl murmured. "At least we can always suffer together."

Then they spoke no more, and the wind howled without stirring them, scream, scream, screaming beyond the brick beyond the room beyond their unity. Clemperer was asleep but not asleep: in his mind's corner, he heard their last words repeated over and over—those words which would later prove so very laden with meaning: "We can always suffer together . . . Its function is to bind us always . . . Wherever we are, whatever happens . . . it will hold us together . . . always."

Each of them faded into a portion of the same trance, as dawn malingered in like moonlight.

She stood on the quayside with Spring, smudging one last tissue over her complexion. They had to get back to the yacht; the owner expected them—he was going to sail round Jedder Island today, whatever the weather. They would be back in port by nightfall; they would meet again then. Behind them, a ferryman waited to pilot them back over the rocking waters to the yacht.

In the tension of the moment, Clemperer found himself using conventional phrases of farewell. It did not matter. Whatever he or they did would never matter; each would always understand; their faith was limitless; the last barriers had gone with the night.

He touched both their cheeks with his, the greasy ones, the grey, stubbly ones. Contact with them almost choked him. He loved them infinitely. They were gentle people, understanding, accepting, entirely open to the wounds of the world.

They went off in the boat. The bully morning air blustered about Alice's dark head. There was a lack of bitterness in parting ; it was not a real parting. Yet Clemperer felt defeated. He had said, 'We are in some way aloof from time and space,' and now it seemed obviously untrue. To know nothing—that was existence. Clemperer turned away, heading wearily back to his room.

He slept.

At five in the afternoon, he woke screaming. A pane of glass in his window had shattered. He sat up on his frowsty bed, unable to orient himself. At first he believed himself drowning. The waters had been pouring over him, lashing his face. His lungs had been clotted with spray.

Clemperer rose dazedly, staggering off the bed.

The wind had smashed his window. Dying at daybreak, the gale had now goaded itself into a full-size storm, cannonading in from the sea over the supine town.

Something else was also wrong, something he felt inside. Clemperer was fully dressed, even to his overcoat. Taking a brief gulp of water from the tap, washing it round his tired mouth, he hurried from the house. It was strange not to wake in a whisky haze, strange to wake to a purpose. Spring and Alice were in trouble, danger.

Hurrying down the narrow sloping streets, he arrived at the harbour. Directly he saw the people lining the sea wall, he knew ; indeed, he had known before. Everyone stared out to sea, most silent, some shouting and pointing. As he ran past them, Clemperer caught salty crumbs of talk : a yacht was in difficulties, the lifeboat was out, the Jedder Current made a rescue awkward.

He ran up the long hill to the highest point of the cliffs, running as he had not run for years, running like one possessed.

From the top, Jedder Island was a dark smudge on the skyline. The black clouds were busy erasing it with their spurting bellies. Even as he looked, the rain rushed in across the sea, dashing for the coast, patterning the breakers, striking him in the face with a handful of drops as hard as pebbles. In a moment, he was drenched through his coat.

But in that last clear glimpse over the waters, Clemperer had seen the yacht—seen it heel over and slide beneath the churning surface. The lifeboat was nowhere near it, cut off

by an angry race of green foam that marked the Jeddar Current. For anyone aboard the yacht, there could have been no hope of life ; it had gone down in an instant.

"Clemperer !" In his ears he heard *their* ringing cry as the craft went under, bearing *them* with it.

Now he was dead inside, neatly novacained of all sensation. The storm bellowed in his face, hissed in his ears, but inside him was only silence, as wearily he made his way downhill again, slipping and bumping down regardlessly. He walked in a dream, shouldering a passage through the sombre crowd still waiting by the harbour. Hardly conscious of the direction he took, Clemperer crossed the road and padded wetly into Karpenkario's.

Alice and Spring were sitting waiting for him at their old table. They were wetter than he was, but they were smiling.

Brian W. Aldiss

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IN GRATITUDE

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

Robert Silverberg's latest contribution is centred around environment controlling personality—in an extremely novel and interesting manner. Given a common background, can differing individuals be made to conform to specialised training and their future lives shaped accordingly.

Since I was raised from earliest infancy to undertake the historian's calling, and since it is now certain that I shall never claim that profession as my own, it seems fitting that I perform my first and last act as an historian.

I shall write the history of that strange and unique woman, the mother of my thirty brothers and myself, Miss Donna Mitchell.

She was a person of extraordinary strength and vision, our mother. I remember her vividly, seeing her with all her sons gathered round her in our secluded Wisconsin farmhouse on the first night of summer, after we had returned to her from every part of the country for our summer's vacation. One-and-thirty strapping sons, each one of us six feet one inch tall, with a shock of unruly yellow hair and keen, clear blue eyes, each one of us healthy, strong, well-nourished, each one of us twenty-one years and fourteen days old, one-and-thirty identical brothers.

Oh, there were differences between us, but only we and she could perceive them. To outsiders, we were identical ; which was why, to outsiders, we took care never to appear together in groups. We ourselves knew the differences, for we had lived with them so long.

I knew my brother Leonard's cheekmole—the right cheek it was, setting him off from Jonas, whose left cheek was marked with a flyspeck. I knew the faint tilt of Peter's chin, the slight oversharphness of Dewey's nose, the florid tint of Donald's skin. I recognized Paul by his pendulous earlobes, Charles by his squint, Noel by the puckering of his lowerlip. David had a blue-stubbled face, Mark flaring nostrils, Claude thick brows.

Yes, there were differences. We rarely confused one with another. It was second nature for me to distinguish Edward from Albert, George from Philip, Frederick from Stephen. And Mother *never* confused us.

She was a regal woman, nearly six feet in height, who even in middle age had retained straightness of posture and majesty of bearing. Her eyes, like ours, were blue ; her hair, she told us, had once been golden like ours. Her voice was a deep, mellow contralto ; rich, firm, commanding, the voice of a strong woman. She had been Professor of Biochemistry at some Eastern university (she never told us which one, hating its name so) and we all knew by heart the story of her bitter life and of our own strange birth.

"I had a theory," she would say. "It wasn't an orthodox theory, and it made people angry to think about it, so of course they threw me out. But I didn't care. In many ways that was the most fortunate day of my life."

"Tell us about it, Mother," Philip would invariably ask. He was destined to be a playwright ; he enjoyed the repetition of the story whenever we were together.

She said :

"I had a theory. I believed that environment controlled personality, that given the same set of healthy genes any number of different adults could be shaped from the raw material. I had a plan for testing it—but when I told them, they discharged me. Luckily I had married a wealthy if superficial-minded executive who had suffered a fatal coronary attack the year before. I was independently wealthy, thanks to him, and free to pursue independent research, thanks to

my University discharge. So I came to Wisconsin and began my great project."

We knew the rest of the story by heart, as a sort of litany.

We knew how she had bought a huge, rambling farm in the flat green country of central Wisconsin, a farm far from prying eyes. Then, how one summer she had obtained by devious methods a phial of male sperms from the Artificial Insemination Bank of a County Hospital.

And then, the story of that single miraculous zygote, which our mother had extracted from her body and carefully nurtured in special nutrient tanks, irradiating it and freezing it and irritating it and dosing it with hormones until, exasperated, it sub-divided into thirty-two, each one of which developed independently into a complete embryo.

Embryo grew into foetus, and foetus into child, in Mother's ingenious artificial wombs. One of the thirty-two died before birth of accidental narcosis ; the remainder survived, thirty-one identical males sprung from the same egg, to become us.

With the formidable energy that typified her, Mother single-handed nursed thirty-one baby boys ; we thrived, we grew. And then the most crucial stage of the experiment began. We were differentiated at the age of eighteen months, each given his own room, his own particular toys, his own special books later on. Each of us was slated for a different profession. It was the ultimate proof of her theory. Genetically identical, physically identical except for the minor changes time had worked on our individual bodies, we would nevertheless seek out different fields of employ.

She worked out the assignments at random, she said. Philip was to be a playwright, Noel a novelist, Donald a doctor. Astronomy was Allan's goal, Barry's biology, Albert's the stage. George was to be a concert pianist, Claude a composer, Leonard a member of the bar, Dewey a dentist. Mark was to be an athlete ; David, a diplomat. Journalism waited for Jonas, poetry for Peter, painting for Paul. Edward would become an engineer, Saul a soldier, Charles a statesman ; Stephen would go to sea. Martin was aimed for chemistry, Raymond for physics, James for high finance. Ronald would be a librarian, Robert a book-keeper, John a priest, Douglas a teacher. Anthony was to be a literary critic, William an actor, Frederick an airplane pilot. For Richard was reserved

a life of crime ; as for myself, Harold, I was to devote my energies to the study and writing of history.

This was my mother's plan. Let me tell of my own childhood and adolescence, to illustrate its workings.

My first recollections are of books. I had a room on the second floor of our big house. Martin's room was to my left, and in later years I would regret it, for the air was always heavy with the stink of his chemical experiments. To my right was Noel, whose precocious typewriter sometimes pounded all night as he worked on his endless first novel.

But those manifestations came later. I remember waking one morning to find that during the night a bookcase had been placed in my room, and in it a single book—Hendrik Willem van Loon's *Story of Mankind*. I was four, almost five, then ; thanks to Mother's intensive training we were all capable readers by that age, and I puzzled over the big type, learning of the exploits of Charlemagne and Richard the Lion-hearted and staring at the squiggly scratches that were van Loon's illustrations.

Other books followed, in years to come. H. G. Wells' *Outline of History*, which fascinated and repelled me at the same time. Toynbee, in the Somervell abridgement, and later, when I had entered adolescence, the complete and unabridged edition. Churchill, with his flowing periods and ringing prose. Sandburg's poetic and massive life of Lincoln ; Wedgwood on the Thirty Years' War ; Will Durant, in six or seven block-like volumes.

I read these books, and where I did not understand I read on anyway, knowing I would come back to that page in some year to come and bring new understanding to it. Mother helped, and guided, and chivvied. A sense of the panorama of man's vast achievement sprang up in me. To join the roll of mankind's chroniclers seemed the only possible end for my existence.

Each summer from my fourteenth to my seventeenth, I travelled—alone, of course, since Mother wanted to build self-reliance in us. I visited the great historical places of the United States : Washington, D.C., Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, Bull Run, Gettysburg. A sense of the past rose in me.

Those summers were my only opportunities for contact with strangers, since during the year and especially during the long snowbound winters we stayed on the farm, a tight family

unit. We never went to public school ; obviously, it was impossible to enroll us, en masse, without arousing the curiosity my mother wished to avoid.

Instead, she tutored us privately, giving us care and attention that no professional teacher could possibly have supplied. And we grew older, diverging toward our professions like branching limbs of a tree.

As a future historian, of course, I took it upon myself to observe the changes in my own society, which was bounded by the acreage of our farm. I made notes on the progress of my brothers, keeping my notebooks well hidden, and also on the changes time was working on Mother. She stood up surprisingly well, considering the astonishing burden she had taken upon herself. Formidable was the best word to use in describing her.

We grew into adolescence. By this time Martin had an imposing chemical laboratory in his room ; Leonard harangued us all on legal fine points, and Anthony pored over Proust and Kafka, delivering startling critical interpretations. Our house was a beehive of industry constantly, and I don't remember being bored for more than three consecutive seconds, at any time. There were always distractions : Claude and George jostling for room on the piano bench while they played. Claude's four-hand sonata, Mark hurling a baseball through a front window, Peter declaiming a sequence of shocking sonnets during our communal dinner.

We fought, of course, since we were healthy individualists with sound bodies. Mother encouraged it ; Saturday afternoon was wrestling time, and we pitted our growing strengths against one another.

Mother was always the dominant figure, striding tall and erect around the farm, calling to us in her familiar boom, assigning us chores, meeting with us privately. Somehow she had the knack of making each of us think we were the favourite child, the one in whose future she was most deeply interested of all. It was false, of course ; though once Jonas unkindly asserted that Barry must be her *real* favourite, because he, like her, was a biologist.

I doubted it. I had learned much about people through my constant reading, and I knew that Mother was something extraordinary—a fanatic, if you like, or merely a woman driven by an inner demon, but still and all a person of overwhelming

intellectual drive and conviction, whose will to know the truth had led her to undertake this fantastic experiment in biology and human breeding.

I knew that no woman of that sort could stoop to petty favouritism. Mother was unique. Perhaps, had she been born a man, she would have changed the entire course of human development.

When we were seventeen, she called us all together round the big table in the common room of our rambling home. She waited, needing to clear her throat only once in order to cut the hum of conversation.

"Sons," she said, and the echo rang through the entire first floor of the house. "Sons, the time has come for you to leave the farm."

We were stunned, even those of us who were expecting it. But she explained, and we understood, and we did not quarrel.

One could not become a doctor or a chemist or a novelist or even an historian in a total vacuum. One had to enter the world. And one needed certain professional qualifications.

We were going to college.

Not all of us, of course. Robert was to be a bookkeeper ; he would go to a business school. Mark had developed, through years of practice, into a superb right-handed pitcher, and he was to go to Milwaukee for a major-league tryout. Claude and George, aspiring composer and aspiring pianist, would attend an eastern conservatory together, posing as twins.

The rest of us were to attend colleges, and those who were to go on to professions such as medicine or chemistry would plan to attend professional schools afterward. Mother believed the college education was essential, even to a poet or a painter or a novelist.

Only one of us was not sent to any accredited institution. He was Richard, who was to be our criminal. Already he had made several sallies into the surrounding towns and cities, returning a few days or a few weeks later with money or jewels and with a guilty grin on his face. He was simply to be turned loose into the school of Life, and Mother warned him never to get caught.

As for me, I was sent to Princeton and enrolled as a liberal-arts student. Since, like my brothers, I was privately educated, I had no diplomas or similar records to show them, and they

had to give me an equivalency examination in their place. Evidently I did quite well, for I was immediately accepted. I wired Mother, who sent a cheque for \$3,000 to cover my first year's tuition and expenses.

I enrolled as a History major ; among my first-year courses were Mediaeval English Constitutional History and the Survey of Western Historical Currents ; naturally, my marks were the highest in the class in both cases. I worked diligently and even with a sort of frenzied fury. My other courses, in the sciences or in the arts, I devoted no more nor no less time to than was necessary, but history was my ruling passion.

At least, through my first two semesters of college.

June came, and final exam, and then I returned to Wisconsin, where Mother was waiting. It was June 21 when I returned ; since not all colleges end their spring semester simultaneously some of my brothers had been home for more than a week, others had not yet arrived. Richard had sent word that he was in Los Angeles, and would be with us after the first of July. Mark had signed a baseball contract and was pitching for a team in New Mexico, and he, too, would not be with us.

The summer passed rapidly. We spent it as we had in the old days before college, sharing our individual specialities, talking, meeting regularly and privately with Mother to discuss the goals that still lay ahead. Except for Claude and George, we had scattered in different directions, no two of us at the same school.

I returned to Princeton that autumn, for my sophomore year. It passed, and I made the homeward journey again, and in the autumn travelled once more eastward. The junior year went by likewise.

And I began to detect signs of a curious change in my inward self. It was a change I did not dare mention to Mother, on those July days when I met with her in her room near the library. I did not tell my brothers, either. I kept my knowledge to myself, brooding over it, wondering why it was that this thing should happen to me, why I should be singled out.

For I was discovering that the study of history bored me utterly and completely.

The spirit of rebellion grew in me during my final year in college. My marks had been excellent ; I had achieved Phi Beta Kappa and several graduate schools were interested in

having me continue my studies with them. But I had been speaking to a few chosen friends (none of whom knew my bizarre family background, of course) and my values had been slowly shifting.

I realized that I had mined history as deeply as I ever cared to. Waking and sleeping, for more than fifteen years, I had pondered Waterloo and Bunker Hill, considered the personalities of Cromwell and James II, held imaginary conversations with Jefferson and Augustus Caesar and Charles Martel.

And I was bored with it.

It began to become evident to others, eventually. One day during my final semester a friend asked me, "Is there something worrying you, Harry?"

I shook my head quickly—*too* quickly. "No," I said. "Why? Do I look worried?"

"You look worse than worried. You look obsessed."

We laughed about it, and finally we went down to the student centre and had a few beers, and before long my tongue had loosened a little.

I said, "There *is* something worrying me. And you know what it is? I'm afraid I won't live up to the standards my family set for me."

Guffaws greeted me. "Come off it, Harry! Phi Bete in your junior year, top class standing, a brilliant career in history ahead of you—what do they want from you, blood?"

I chuckled and gulped my beer and mumbled something innocuous, but inside I was curdling.

Everything I was, I owed to Mother. She made me what I am. But I was played out, as a student of history; I was the family failure, the goat, the rotten egg. Raymond still wrestled gleefully with nuclear physics, with Heisenberg and Schrodinger and the others. Mark gloried in his fastball and his slider and his curve. Paul daubed canvas merrily in his Greenwich Village flat near N.Y.U., and even Robert seemed to take delight in keeping books.

Only I had failed. History had become repugnant to me. I was in rebellion against it. I would disappoint my mother, become the butt of my brothers' scorn, and live in despair, hating the profession of historian and fitted by training for nothing else.

I was graduated from Princeton summa cum laude, a few days after my twenty-first birthday. I wired Mother that I was on my way home, and bought train-tickets.

It was a long and gruelling journey to Wisconsin. I spent my time thinking, trying to choose between the unpleasant alternatives that faced me.

I could attempt duplicity, telling my mother I was still studying history, while actually preparing myself for some more attractive profession—the law, perhaps.

I could confess to her at once my failure of purpose, ask her forgiveness for disappointing her and flawing her grand scheme, and try to begin afresh in another field.

Or I could forge ahead with history, compelling myself grimly to take an interest, cramping and paining myself so that my mother's design would be complete.

None of them seemed desirable paths to take. I brooded over it, and was weary and apprehensive by the time I arrived at our farm.

The first of my brothers I saw was Mark. He sat on the front porch of the big house, reading a book which I recognized at once and with some surprise as Volume I of Churchill. He looked up at me and smiled feebly.

I frowned. "I didn't expect to find *you* here, Mark. According to the local sports pages the Braves are playing on the Coast this week. How come you're not with them?"

His voice was a low murmur. "Because they gave me my release," he said.

"What?"

He nodded. "I'm washed up at 21. They made me a free agent; that means I can hook up with any team that wants me."

"And you're just taking a little rest before offering yourself around?"

He shook his head. "I'm through. Kaput. Harry, I just can't stand baseball. It's a silly, stupid game. You know how many times I had to stand out there in baggy knickers and throw a bit of horsehide at some jerk with a club in his paws? A hundred, hundred-fifty times a game, every four days. For what? What the hell does it all mean? Why should I bother?"

There was a strange gleam in his eyes. I said, "Have you told Mother?"

"I don't dare ! She thinks I'm on leave, or something. Harry, how can I tell her—"

"I know." Briefly, I told him of my own disenchantment with history. We were mutually delighted to learn that we were not alone in our affliction. I picked up my suitcases, scrambled up the steps, and went inside.

Dewey was cleaning up the common room as I passed through. He nodded hello glumly. I said, "How's the tooth trade ?"

He whirled and glared at me viciously.

"Something wrong ?" I asked.

"I've been accepted by four dental schools, Harry."

"Is that any cause for misery ?"

He let the broom drop, walked over to me, and whispered, "I'll murder you if you tell Mother this. But the thought of spending my life poking around in foul-smelling oral cavities sickens me. *Sickens.*"

"But I thought—"

"Yeah. You thought. You've got it soft ; you just need to dig books out of the library and rearrange what they say and call it new research. I have to drill and clean and fill and plug and—" He stopped. "Harry, I'll kill you if you breathe a word of this. I don't want Mother to know that I didn't come out the way she wanted."

I repeated what I had said to Mark—and told him about Mark, for good measure. Then I made my way upstairs to my old room. I felt a burden lifting from me ; I was not alone. At least two of my brothers felt the same way. I wondered how many more were at last rebelling against the disciplines of a lifetime.

Poor Mother, I thought ! Poor Mother !

Our first family council of the summer was held that night. Stephen and Saul were the last to arrive, Stephen resplendent in his Annapolis garb, Saul crisp-looking and stiff-backed from West Point. Mother had worked hard to wangle appointments for these two.

We sat around the big table and chatted. The first phase of our lives, Mother told us, had ended. Now, our preliminary educations were complete, and we would undertake the final step towards our professions, those of us who had not already entered them.

Mother looked radiant that evening, tall, energetic, her white hair cropped mannishly short, as she sat about the table with her thirty-one strapping sons. I envied and pitied her : envied her for the sweet serenity of her life, which had proceeded so inexorably and without swerve toward the goal of her experiment, and pitied her for the disillusioning that awaited her.

For Mark and Dewey and I were not the only failures in the crop.

I had made discreet enquiries, during the day. I learned that Anthony found literary criticism to be a fraud and a sham, that Paul knew clearly he had no talent as a painter (and, also, that very few of his contemporaries did either), that Robert bitterly resented a career of book-keeping, that piano-playing hurt George's fingers, that Claude had had difficulty with his composing because he was tone-deaf, that the journalistic grind was too strenuous for Jonas, that John longed to quit the seminarial life because he had no calling, that Albert hated the uncertain bohemianism of an actor's life—

We circulated, all of us raising for the first time the question that had sprouted in our minds during the past several years. I made the astonishing discovery that not one of Donna Mitchell's sons cared for the career that had been chosen for him.

The experiment had been a resounding flop.

Late that evening, after Mother had gone to bed, we remained together, discussing our predicament. How could we tell her ? How could we destroy her life's work ? And yet, how could we compel ourselves to lives of unending drudgery ?

Robert wanted to study engineering ; Barry, to write. I realized I cared much more for law than for history while Leonard longed to exchange law for the physical sciences. James, our bankermanque, much preferred politics. And so it went, with Richard (who claimed five robberies and innumerable picked pockets) pouring out his desire to settle down and live within the law as an honest farmer.

It was pathetic.

Summing up the problem in his neat forensic way, Leonard said, " Here's our dilemma : do we all keep quiet about this and ruin our lives, or do we speak up and ruin Mother's experiment ? "

"I think we ought to continue as is, for the time being," Saul said. "Perhaps Mother will die in the next year or two. We can start over then."

"Perhaps she *doesn't* die?" Edward wanted to know. "She's tough as nails. She may last another twenty or thirty or even forty years."

"And we're past twenty-one already," remarked Raymond. "If we hang on too long at what we're doing, it'll be too late to change. You can't start studying for a new profession when you're thirty-five."

"Maybe we'll get to *like* what we're doing, by then," suggested David hopefully. "Diplomatic service isn't as bad as all that, and I'd say—"

"What about me?" Paul yelled. "I can't paint and I know I can't paint. I've got nothing but starvation ahead of me unless I wise up and get into business in a hurry. You want me to keep messing up good white canvas the rest of my life?"

"It won't work," said Barry, in a doleful voice. "We'll have to tell her."

Douglas shook his head. "We can't do that. You know just what she'll do. She'll bring down the umpteen volumes of notes she's made on this experiment, and ask us if we're going to let it all come to naught."

"He's right," Albert said. "I can picture the scene now. The big organ-pipe voice blasting us for our lack of faith, the accusations of ingratitude—"

"Ingratitude?" William shouted. "She twisted us and pushed us and moulded us without asking our permission. Hell, she *created* us with her laboratory tricks. But that didn't give her the right to make zombies out of us."

"Still," Martin said, "we can't just go to her and tell her that it's all over. The shock would kill her."

"Well?" Richard asked in the silence that followed. "What's wrong with that?"

For a moment, no one spoke. The house was quiet; we heard footsteps descending the stairs. We froze.

Mother appeared, an imperial figure even in her old housecoat. "You boys are kicking up too much of a racket down here," she boomed. "I know you're glad to see each other again after a year, but I need my sleep."

She turned and strode upstairs again. We heard her bedroom door slam shut. For an instant we were all ten-year-

olds again, diligently studying our books for fear of Mother's displeasure.

I moistened my lips. "Well?" I asked. "I call for a vote on Richard's suggestion."

Martin, as a chemist, prepared the drink, using Donald's medical advice as his guide. Saul, Stephen, and Raymond dug a grave, in the woods at the back of our property. Douglas and Mark built the coffin.

Richard, ending his criminal career with a murder to which we were all accessories before the fact, carried the fatal beverage upstairs to Mother the next morning, and persuaded her to sip it. One sip was all that was necessary; Martin had done his work well.

Leonard offered us a legal opinion: it was justifiable homicide. We placed the body in its coffin and carried it out across the fields. Richard, Peter, Jonas, and Charles were her pallbearers; the others of us followed in their path.

We lowered the body into the ground and John said a few words over her. Then, slowly, we closed over the grave and replaced the sod, and began the walk back to the house.

"She died happy," Anthony said. "She never suspected the size of her failure." It was her epitaph.

As our banker, James supervised the division of her assets, which were considerable, into thirty-one equal parts. Noel composed a short fragment of prose which we agreed summed up our sentiments.

We left the farm that night, scattering in every direction, anxious to begin life. All that went before was a dream from which we now awakened. We agreed to meet at the farm each year, on the anniversary of her death, in memory of the woman who had so painstakingly divided a zygote into thirty-two viable cells, and who had spent a score of years conducting an experiment based on a theory that had proven to be utterly false.

We felt no regret, no qualm. We had done what needed to be done, and on that last day some of us had finally functioned in the professions for which Mother had intended us.

I, too. My first and last work of history will be this, an account of Mother and her experiment, which records the beginning and the end of her work. And now it is complete.

Robert Silverberg

In the second "Outward Bound" article, June 1958, Kenneth Johns covered much of the space medicine field and the effects upon the human body which Man will find on his journey into space. He continues here with details of further researches being conducted under differing conditions of gravity.

OUTWARD BOUND

By Kenneth Johns

4. High-G

It is known as the Wright Air Development Centre ; but the name was given to it back in the 1930's, when space flight was only a dream. Today the emphasis is on higher and farther—higher above the Earth and farther out than man has ever ventured before. To all intents and purposes this means rocket flight in airless conditions, or where the air is so tenuous it is only an inconvenience. From the squat concrete cells where the rocket motors are tested to the quiet and efficient administrative blocks, this centre—this Air Development Centre is devoted to space flight.

The strange shapes in the sky and on the runways, and the earth-hammering power of static tests, are only a part of the Centre's work, just as this centre is only one of ten such units scattered across the length and breadth of the United States.

The work of its Aero Medical Laboratory, where scientists have to work ten years in the future, is just as important. Already they are making space their business, meeting the problems of men treated as parts of machines under stresses unknown ten years ago.

The Aero Medical Labs stretch over more than 100,000 square feet and include centrifuges, vacuum test chambers and all the modern physiological research equipment needed to duplicate and analyse the intense forces to be encountered when man climbs starwards.

High gravity was just one of the problems studied and overcome as part of the project "Physiology of Outer Space." Admittedly it had immediate application in fast jets ; but the researchers' eyes were fixed on a much higher horizon where the brute power of rockets is needed—and must be controlled by men.

Dr. Henry worked with Dr. Gaeur on discovering the warping effect of gravity on the human body, using acceleration to produce artificially the effect of gravity. Any alteration in the motion of a body, whether it be a change of speed or direction, causes acceleration of that body. In some instances this acceleration balances the acceleration due to gravity so that, effectively, the body experiences zero gravity. But high linear acceleration or rapid changes of direction, as in a centrifuge, create all the physical results of high gravity.

Sufficiently high G will kill, as was found when test animals were subjected to forces in excess of that which their bodies could withstand.

At the Wright Air Development Centre, scientists used a giant centrifuge with twin booms swinging through a 24-foot radius. On one arm was mounted a cabin, on the other a platform fitted with strong straps. Volunteers could judge the point when they were blacking out by watching a panel of lights and by pressing a button could inform the centrifuge operator when the lights appeared to dim in the grey twilight region between consciousness and unconsciousness.

This giant centrifuge could produce a body-crushing 21-G when it span at 52 revolutions per minute. A smaller centrifuge—eight feet diameter—could be spun faster and produce a tremendous 60-G, well beyond the resistance of flesh and muscle structure, and was used with test animals.

Because of the way evolution has shaped our bodies, with a constant one-G to contend with, we have to deal with two sorts of gravitic effects. *Positive G*, when the blood is pulled from the brain towards the feet, is an old problem. Standing up, we always have one positive G dragging at us ; but when a pilot pulls a fast aeroplane out of a dive, this can rise to 5-G and more. The effect of positive G is to thrust the blood below the level of the heart, so that blood cannot be pumped from the thorax through the brain. The result is blood starvation and pilot blackout—final blackout if he is too close to the ground.

Blackout from high positive G may be counteracted by wearing a G-suit. This is an inflatable suit that applies pressure to the legs and abdomen and so forces the blood back to the heart and from thence to the brain. Protected thus, a pilot can take 7 positive G and still retain consciousness. In addition, the human body gradually becomes acclimatised to such heavy gravities, as was shown by Dr. Henry.

For the first two months of the tests, he was horribly ill each time he rode the centrifuge. Later on, he could do it without any harm. Spacemen tend to regard the human body as a weak organism—as indeed it is—but it does have surprising reservoirs of hidden power. Even during one run, if the centrifuge was kept at a constant speed just at the point where lights dimmed and blackout was imminent, the doctor found that his body adjusted itself and normal functioning of the brain under these arduous conditions returned.

However, in this day and age of rockets, there is a second—and worse—gravity problem to be met, that of *Negative G*. When you stand on your head you experience one negative G. Its effects are entirely different from those of positive G.

Before Drs. Henry and Gaeur experimented, it was believed that heavy, negative G could be endured by the human body only for a fraction of a second. All research workers in this field believed that if a man was subjected to it for whole seconds, it would result in brain haemorrhages as blood vessels burst under the increased pressure. The end results would be insanity and, finally, death.

The stultifying effect of this belief led to fast aeroplanes being designed without the ability to withstand negative G, and manoeuvres such as levelling out quickly from a steep climb and forcing the aircraft into a tight outside turn were looked upon as quick ways to die.

Yet there were only slender grounds for this belief. It was true that some research workers had reported bleeding from the ears and noses of test animals and had found evidence of brain haemorrhages during dissection ; but the work was scant in comparison to, say, the amount of work that goes into the design of a jet engine.

So pilots were limited to a maximum of two and a half negative G for five seconds.

At the Wright Air Development Centre, scientists found that the picture was not so simple. They subjected animals to high negative G for long periods of time, and, sure enough, the animals died. But not from brain haemorrhages. Death was due to lack of air, to asphyxia as the throat and lungs were blocked by swelling of the mucous membrane and tongue as the blood was forced into the upper part of the body. In addition, there were haemorrhages from the ears and noses of the animals.

When asphyxia was circumvented by a metal breathing tube being inserted, animals could live after being subjected to 15 negative G for 30 seconds, and there was no sign whatsoever of brain haemorrhage.

In fact there was no blood from ears and noses, either, pointing to these being a by-product of suffocation. Even when adrenalin was injected to raise their blood pressure artificially, animals still withstood 15 negative G without damage to their brains.

The difference between these results and earlier studies was finally tracked down to careless dissection and to previous workers reporting what they had expected to find.

When human volunteers began to experience high negative G in the centrifuge, various other unpleasant side-effects became apparent. Sinuses are the hollow bones above and below the eyes connected by drainage tubes to the nose. Particularly severe and intense pain in the sinuses and eyes was experienced. At two and a half negative G, the small blood vessels in the whites of the eyes burst. At 3 negative G, these began to haemorrhage, the subject's pulse slowed and his face became puffed up with the extra blood. His mind was confused and he experienced intense headaches lasting up to forty-eight hours after cessation of the test.

Spinning at 4 negative G resulted in temporary blindness and deafness, the subject began to choke and his head felt as if it was expanding like a balloon. Severe bleeding from the nose did nothing to help his condition.

Obviously, the present human body is little suited to the extremes of gravity likely to be met with whilst outward bound or on exploration of alien planets. It is therefore essential that our technology be used to reinforce our puny frames with mechanical aids.

Here it must be emphasised that these effects increase in severity with the time that they are experienced. 10 negative G for several seconds will cause excruciating pain, asphyxia and haemorrhages.

In all this research the physiological responses of the volunteers were monitored by instruments to measure their heart beats, blood pressures, brain waves and breathing rates and oxygen content of their blood. It was from these measurements that scientists discovered how to combat negative gravity.

The general theory of the effect of gravity on the human body is simply that a man standing upright has a column of blood extending from his heart to his ankles where it creates a pressure of 2lbs. per square inch. 5 positive G increases this to 10lbs per square inch, enough to distend the elastic veins so that most of the blood is stored in the lower part of the body. Following this, it would be expected that a man standing on his head would have the pressure of a column of blood from his heart to his brain, about half pound p.s.i. acting inside his head. This would be expected to rise to $2\frac{1}{2}$ pounds p.s.i. under 5 negative G.

Yet, as so often happens, what is expected is not found to be so when checked by experiment.

It was already known that a man lying flat on his back could happily withstand three times as much positive G as when sitting upright, due to the very small columns of blood involved.

A simple series of experiments showed that negative G created pressures in the head that must involve blood coming from the lower part of the body, thus destroying the theory that only the blood between the heart and the head generated the painful pressures in the head.

A volunteer had a hollow needle inserted, and strapped into position, in a vein in his forehead. Blood pressure acted on a

small electronic pressure gauge enabling a continuous record of his venous pressure to be charted. Strapped on a tiltable chair, he was swung at the end of the centrifuge boom whilst an electric motor turned the chair over and over. Starting from different positions, turning in different patterns, records were made to check every conceivable factor that might influence his blood pressure and so contribute to an understanding of the effects of negative G.

Analysis of the results showed that the subject's initial position was of the greatest importance. With his legs bent at right angles to his body, he started on his back with his legs in the air, and, later, on his stomach with his legs hanging down. Starting with his legs in the air resulted in a greater maximum pressure build-up than with his legs hanging downwards. This was found to be due to the blood in the legs in the first instance flowing into the body and then being trapped there by the bend at the hips. In the second case the blood was trapped in the legs and could not escape above the hips, and so did not contribute to the pressure on the brain.

Final proof of this theory came when the doctors placed a tourniquet around a volunteer's thigh and tilted and swung him in the centrifuge.

There was no difference in the maximum blood pressure no matter what the starting attitude may have been—and the maximum blood pressure recorded in the forehead vein was lower than in previous cases.

These discoveries were put to use in the design of the anti-negative G-suit. As the gravities build up so the air pressure in the helmet is raised to counteract the pressure of blood in the head. Pressure cuffs round the thighs—more sophisticated types of tourniquet—can be inflated to isolate the leg blood and cut down the maximum blood pressure. With this suit, pilots can breathe easily and think clearly under negative G forces that otherwise would have made them scream with pain as they tried to suck air past their engorged tongue.

Such is the security given by this suit that even the delicate blood vessels in the whites of the eye are not damaged by 5 negative G for 10 seconds endurance. Man's spaceworthy threshold has been raised to four times that of his naked body.

The next step was obvious. The scientists combined their anti-G suits with their best high altitude suit.

What appears very likely is that the spacemen of tomorrow will combine in one suit all the qualities of a spacesuit plus those gravity defying devices, developed in pain and dogged perseverance, that hitherto have been regarded as being situated solely outside the suit. The actual recoiling chairs, acceleration couches, and the rest, will quite possibly be reduced in scope, merely through the greater efficiency of the anti-G suits being designed today.

Space pilots of tomorrow will have reason to bless Drs. Henry and Gaeur. The space suits they will wear will be direct descendants of those designed at the Wright Air Development Centre, based on the pain and experience of forty volunteers and two dedicated scientists.

Kenneth Johns

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

Robert Silverberg has the lead novelette next month with a strong action story "Earthman's Burden" set against the stars. As the title implies, people on other worlds may well have their own ideas about how their planets should be run without any assistance from Earth.

Short stories are interesting and complex—Brian Aldiss presents a psychological story of the distant future in "The Towers of San Ampa," John Kippax makes another of his rare appearances with a robot story entitled "Friday," and Donald Malcolm resumes writing after a lengthy absence with "The Stuff of Dreams"—this one is a dilly of an idea! And, of course, the grand finale of Lan Wright's serial, "A Man Called Destiny," in which Richard Argyie emerges in his true colours.

Ratings for No. 75 were :

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| 1. | Space Is A Province of Brazil | - | John Wyndham |
| 2. | Morgan's Galatea | - - - - | Clifford C. Reed |
| 3. | Equator (<i>Part One</i>) | - - - - | Brian W. Aldiss |
| 4. | Trainee For Mars | - - - - | Harry Harrison |
| 5. | Life Hutch | - - - - | Harlan Ellison |

Blind chance seems to play a very important part in the shaping of destinies, and even in the realm of science it has certainly been responsible for many unexpected discoveries. Let George Whitley introduce you to a simple enough experiment into the Fourth Dimension. All you need is blind chance and . . .

THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

By GEORGE WHITLEY

It is when things get mixed up that they become dangerous.

Take saltpetre, for instance, and charcoal, and sulphur. Of the three, it is only the first named that requires any special care in its handling, and that only because it is a strong supporter of combustion. Mix them in the right proportions, however—and the result is gunpowder.

There must, I imagine, have been a strong element of chance involved in its first manufacture. There was some alchemist, perhaps, who was seeking the Philosopher's Stone or the Elixir of Life, and this combination of three common chemicals was one of the many that he tried. He didn't get what he was looking for but he got something just as powerful, or even more powerful ; a force that changed the social structure of the world and, it may well be, gave rise to the explosive doctrine that all men are equal.

Given the right ingredients and the right people to mix them, anything can happen—especially when blind chance ensures, as it so often does, that the most unlikely ingredients are brought together at the right time. There is the story of

the chemist who was boiling a mixture of sulphuric and nitric acid on the kitchen stove and who, when the flask shattered, used a cotton apron belonging to his wife to swab up the mess. The apron he hung before the stove to dry—and the explosion of his accidental discovery, later known as guncotton, wrecked the kitchen. But should one make any distinction between the people and the ingredients? Should one not say that the people are themselves ingredients and that it is blind chance that does the mixing?

Willesden was, without doubt, one of the essential factors in the strange formula. He had the right sort of mind, inasmuch as it was like a library the shelves of which have been stocked without regard to author, subject or title. In it the Ley and Bonestell *Conquest of Space* stood side by side with Fraser's *The Golden Bough*, and *The Books of Charles Fort* jostled Hoyle's *Frontiers of Astronomy*. It was the mind of a science fiction writer with a taste for pure fantasy, a teller of technicians' bedtime stories who, at times, was quite capable of signing on a werewolf among the crew of one of his interstellar ships, who could imagine and write of the chilly, frustrated ghost of a dead electronic brain.

His was the sort of mind that collects oddities with a magpie avidity. He did not hoard them. Other men have their card tricks or their stocks of anecdotes to suit all occasions and companies; Willesden would try—at times with success—to supply entertainment from his own stock of freaks of numeration.

His hobby was cooking. This was just as well, as he did not earn enough by writing to keep both Felice, his wife, and himself. She could leave the flat in the morning to go to work, secure in the knowledge that in her absence the housework would be done, the shopping accomplished and the evening meal prepared. In some ways, however, this was for her a frustrating arrangement. She, too, liked cooking. She insisted that whenever there were guests for dinner she should prepare the meal, and for several evenings before the occasion would study the cookery books which had a shelf to themselves in the bookcase.

Peter Willesden's cookery was unconventional, but not ambitious. As long as there was garlic to be had he did not worry much, if at all, about more subtle flavourings. Felice, on the other hand, would blend poppy seed and nutmeg, clove

and parsley, cream and lemon juice, having been brought up in the French tradition that the sauce is all important. She would devote to the main course of a meal the loving care that the average Anglo-Saxon housewife gives to the manufacture of one of those cakes that, after slices have been nibbled and the fished-for compliments given, moulder and crumble for weeks in the cake tin before being thrown out to the indiscriminating birds.

"Don't forget," said Felice Willesden as she prepared to make her morning rush to work, "John and Sarah are coming round tonight."

"I'll not forget. Furniture polished, glasses polished, ash trays polished . . . I've made a list. Any more shopping, darling?"

"Just the mushrooms. Oh, there's one thing you might look out for. The dish that I'm doing really requires dried mushrooms as well—just for the extra flavour. If you do see any while you're doing your shopping this morning . . ."

"I'll make a round of the delicatessens," promised Willesden.

Later that morning he did so. He enjoyed, as he always did, shopping in such establishments. The sight of a gnarled, alien sausage, a cartwheel of some exotic cheese, was as aesthetically satisfying to him as would have been the prospect of the Mona Lisa to one of those people—and there must be far fewer of them than the world admits—who find genuine pleasure in the contemplation of the portrait of that ugly rather than plain, unintelligent looking female.

At first he feared that his mission would be unsuccessful. There were packets of mushroom soup. There were tins of mushrooms. It was not until he tried the fourth delicatessen—the last one in the local shopping centre—that he found what Felice wanted. He looked curiously at the scraps of dark brown matter in the cellophane package; they could have been any dehydrated vegetable debris. He noted that the dried mushrooms were imported from Mexico. He paid for them, put them in his shopping bag, and all the way home played with a plot idea, the international character of the delicatessen, the flavour of alien, faraway places that no other shop can ever capture. Suppose, for example, that one found a jar of Altairian swamp spiders pickled in liquid methane . . . Would one be surprised? Would one be *really* surprised? Just one taste of swamp spider, and your brain is wide open to the hypnotic influence of the Altairian Super-Mind . . . The

Super-Mind knows that the real intelligentsia of Earth does its food shopping in delicatessens and so . . .

Willesden got home, found that he had forgotten to purchase the fresh mushrooms and, calling down maledictions on the Altairian Super-Mind, walked bad-temperedly back to the shops.

At five thirty Felice hurried in.

"Pour me a gin," she ordered. Then, "I'll have it in the kitchen. They're coming at six thirty and I want to be changed and have dinner in the oven before then . . ."

Willesden carried the drinks through into the kitchen. He sipped his, watched Felice as she buttered the skillet, browned the fillets of veal. He sniffed appreciatively. He watched her transfer the fillets to the pyrex casserole.

"Sherry," she demanded. He passed her the sherry. "Tomato sauce." He took the sherry bottle from her and gave her the sauce in exchange. "Salt." He gave her the salt. "Poppy seed."

"Rather complicated, isn't it?" he ventured.

"It'll be worth it," she replied. "But it's the sauce that's the most work. Did you get those dried mushrooms, by the way?"

"Yes. All the way from sunny Mexico."

"Does it matter where they're from? Are there any instructions with them?"

Willesden studied the card inside the transparent packet.

"Soak in hot water for thirty minutes," he read aloud.

"Then take out a couple of pieces and do just that. Let me know when the time is up."

Swiftly she peeled the fresh mushrooms, threw them into a saucepan. She added chopped spring onion, chopped parsley.

"Cloves," she snapped. "Nutmeg. Thyme."

"You remind me of the three witches," remarked Willesden.

"Which three witches? Pass me a lemon, will you?"

"In *Macbeth*. Old Bill must have had a prevision of your cookery . . . How does it go?"

"Old Bill *who*? Where's the cream?"

"Here. Bill Shakespeare, of course. Me and Bill—honest wordsmiths both. But it was the recipe that I was trying to remember . . .

*Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the caldron boil and bake ;
Eye of the newt, and toe of the frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog . . .*

"You'd have to be careful not to *burn* the bat's wool, although I'd imagine that it'd be apt to get between the teeth if you didn't crisp it . . ."

"You," she said, "are disgusting."

"Not me. Bill. Wait till he gets really warmed up."

*Finger of birth-strangled babe,
Ditch-delivered by a drab . . .*

"The way these dried mushrooms smell they wouldn't have been out of place in that caldron . . ."

"They should have a strong smell," she told him. "I'm going to change now. You can wash the frying pan, and you can give the mushrooms an occasional stir so they don't burn. When the half hour is up throw in the dried ones."

"*Double, double, toil and trouble,*" quoted Willesden.

"*Fire, burn ; and, caldron, bubble !*"

The dinner was a success. Like the Willesden's, John Denholm loved good food, and Sarah, although a small eater, enjoyed what she did eat. When the meal was over Felice cleared the table and brought in coffee. With the second cup, Peter Willesden served brandy. As he sipped his from the inhaler, Willesden thought, I should have had only one glass of gin before dinner, or only one glass of claret with dinner . . . Even so, the amount I've had to drink wasn't enough to hurt a fly . . . Damn it all, I shouldn't have trouble focussing my eyes after the little I've had . . . He looked at the others. Felice usually noticed at once if he showed signs of having had too much to drink, but she was chatting animatedly with Sarah.

Sarah was telling Felice of a mutual friend who had become a convert to Spiritualism. "And she *believes* it," she said.

"And why shouldn't she ?" asked John Denholm.

"But it's so . . . How shall I put it ? There's so much trickery. What do you think, Peter ?"

"There's *something* there," said Willesden cautiously. "But I've yet to be convinced that it comes from outside."

"But it *must*," asserted Sarah.

"Not necessarily. You've all heard about Rhine, of course,

and the experiments at Duke University. Telepathy, telekinesis, precognition and all the rest of it . . .”

“And what,” asked Sarah, “is telekinesis?”

“The ability to move things by the power of the mind. It accounts for levitation and table rapping and all the so-called poltergeist phenomena. As a matter of fact, we can perform a simple little experiment right now. For all we know to the contrary, one of us may possess telekinetic powers . . .”

While the others watched he set up his simple apparatus. There was a matchbox standing on its end, a long pin thrust upwards through the short side of the tray. There was a little square of paper cut from a spoiled sheet of manuscript, folded into the shape of a tiny tent and neatly trimmed with a pair of scissors. The little tent was placed on the point of the pin, where it pivoted freely.

“Now,” said Willesden, “concentrate. See if any of us can make the thing turn.”

They concentrated. Once again Willesden had trouble in focussing his eyes. It seemed to him that the others were in like condition. He felt a little relieved. He never enjoyed the occasional post mortem after a social evening arising out of his alleged inability to hold his liquor.

“Telekinesis,” said Denholm at last, “seems to be conspicuous by its absence. A pity, after all the trouble you went to to make that little tent . . . Talking of making things out of paper—did you ever show Felice or Sarah the paper band?”

“The paper band?” asked Willesden. “Oh, yes. The Mobius Strip . . .”

“The Mobius Strip?” asked Felice. “And what’s that when it’s at home?”

“A topological curiosity,” Willesden told her. He got up, went to his work table, and picked up a sheet of paper. “This,” he said, “is essentially a two dimensional object, with two surfaces. A Mobius Strip is a two dimensional object with only *one* surface.”

“But that’s impossible,” said Sarah.

“Is it?”

He picked up his scissors, went through to the kitchen. He cut a long strip from an old newspaper. He brought the two ends together, but rotated one through a half turn before he joined them with adhesive tape. He brought the finished article back to the living room.

"This," he announced, "is it."

"It's just a paper ring," declared Felice.

"It is *not*. Now watch carefully. I'm going to take the scissors and cut down the middle of the strip. When I've cut all the way round, what shall I have?"

"Two paper rings," said his wife.

"Are you sure?"

Willesden snipped away busily. He found that he was having to concentrate hard, too hard, on what should have been a simple task. The scissors seemed almost alive, seemed determined to slip from his grasp. He thought of dowsers, and the way in which their wands of hazel or willow or twisted wire were supposed to move of their own volition. He wondered if he possessed the talent for divining and if there was flowing water, or oil, or uranium under the foundations of the block of flats.

"There!" he said triumphantly, holding aloft the single paper band.

"It must be a trick," said Felice stubbornly.

"It is *not* a trick—although it has been used by conjurors. Now—what happens if I cut round again?"

"The same as last time," said Sarah.

"You should be taking bets," suggested Denholm.

"I should be—but I'm too gentlemanly to take the ladies' money."

Damn these scissors, he thought. It's almost as though there were a dirty great magnetic field somewhere . . . And I can hardly see the things, although everything else is clear enough . . .

"Are you sure it's going to be *one* ring?" he asked.

"Of course," asserted Felice and Sarah, whilst Denholm chuckled.

Willesden made the last cut, held up the two rings, the large one and the small one interlocked.

"There must be a catch in it," insisted Felice. "How does it happen?"

"Look at it this way," said Willesden. "Even though you knew nothing about science fiction before you met me, you've been exposed to most of the basic ideas since then. You've read stories in which Space has been warped. Three dimensional space is warped through a fourth dimension, and what

happens next is whatever whoever happens to be writing the story wants to happen. What I've been doing is warping two dimensional space through a third dimension. It's that half turn that does it . . . Now, just suppose that you're a Flatlander . . ."

"A Flatlander . . ."

"Yes. A two dimensional being inhabiting a two dimensional universe. We'll suppose that it's a finite universe, as ours is supposed to be finite. In other words, it's a band of paper, curved—not warped—through the third dimension with its two ends joined. Just imagine a flat cow, a left profile cow, walking around her little universe. When she gets back to where she started from, she's still a cow in left profile."

"Of course," scoffed Felice. "What else could she be?"

"I haven't finished yet. I'll warp the two dimensional universe. I'll make a Mobius Strip of it. Now, just imagine that cow walking round it. When she gets back to where she started from, she'll be upside down."

The others frowned, trying to visualise the flat cow in her flat world.

"Yes," said Denholm, "I can see that . . ."

After a long pause the two women agreed.

"All right. So we turn the cow the right way up. What then?"

"She's the right way up," said Felice.

"Yes. But . . . Try to visualise it. She'll be facing the other way. She'll be in *right* profile."

"So," asked Felice, "what?"

"Can't you see the . . . the oddity of it? Can't you see what it would be like if we could do the same in *our* universe? Suppose, for example, that one could take off one's shoe . . ." He suited the action to the words, remembering too late that there was a hole in the toe of his left sock. "Suppose that one could take off one's left shoe and rotate it one hundred and eighty degrees through the fourth dimension . . ."

"I told you to change your socks," said Felice.

"I'm talking about shoes, not socks." He was turning the shoe in his hands as he spoke, not looking at it. "In any case, darling, you're the official sock darning of the family."

"I'm not clairvoyant," retorted his wife. "If you give me socks to darn, I'll darn them."

"But what happens when you rotate your left shoe through half a circle?" asked Denholm.

"It's obvious. You get its mirror image. You get a right shoe."

"Must we look at your big toe?" asked Felice.

"Hindu wives *worship* their husbands' big toes," Willesden told her.

"I," she said icily, "am not a Hindu."

"Unfortunately," Willesden replied. He was trying to get his shoe back on. The simple task was beyond him. He thought, I must be drunk. He looked down to what he was doing and discovered that he was trying to force a right shoe on to his left foot.

It is when things get mixed up that they become dangerous.

Take a group of people, for example, who have been discussing paranormal psychology and kindred matters. See to it that prior to the discussion they have eaten a meal, one of the ingredients of which has been dried mushrooms of Mexican origin. Arrange matters so that from paranormal psychology they turn to topology in general and Mobius Strips in particular.

There are some odd mushrooms growing in Mexico. Those who eat them see visions and, in some cases, are able to foresee the future, which implies a certain tinkering with Time—and Time, after all, is a dimension.

Time is a dimension, but, no matter how glibly we talk of the Space-Time Continuum, we don't usual think of it as such. But if some drug—some derivative, say, from the hallucinogenic Mexican fungi—be taken, thereby enhancing the over-all vision of all things, Past, Present and Future, as one crystalline unity, and if the mind be led from the illusory three dimensional universe along the twisting Mobius way . . .

Given the right ingredients and the right people to mix them, anything can happen—especially when blind chance ensures, as it so often does, that the most unlikely ingredients are brought together at the right time. But should one make any distinction between the people and the ingredients? Should one not say that the people are themselves ingredients and that it is blind chance that does the mixing?

Willesden was, without doubt, one of the essential factors in the strange formula. So was Felice, with her insistence on dried mushrooms as an essential ingredient for her recipe. So was Sarah, with her talk of the friend who was a convert to Spiritualism, and so was John Denholm, whose suggestion it

was that Willesden demonstrate the peculiar properties of the Mobius Strip.

It is when things get mixed up that they become dangerous—but only when *all* the ingredients are there. Take saltpetre, for instance, and charcoal, and sulphur. Mix them in the right proportions—and the result is gunpowder. Take saltpetre and charcoal—and the result is a fizzle ; or charcoal and sulphur—and the result is a stink ; or saltpetre and sulphur—and the result is a stink *and* a fizzle. For the Big Bang you want *everything*.

There must be somebody in this world who could make a Big Bang out of the potentially explosive mixture of Mobius and mushrooms. Willesden, for all his imagination and wide, but scrappy, knowledge, is not that somebody. Neither is John Denholm, for all that he is a successful businessman. Both Felice and Sarah feel—as they all felt after they had discussed the fantastic affair of the transposed shoe well into the following morning—that they have stumbled upon something of the utmost importance, both to the world and to themselves, but *what* ?

Since that night they have eaten dried mushrooms and covered the floor with twisted circles of paper, but all to no avail. The packet that Willesden purchased at the delicatessen must have contained only one scrap of the “ god food.”

Meanwhile, Denholm is trying, through his connections in Mexico, to import a further supply of the hallucinogenic fungi. Willesden hopes that it will not take too long ; it was his favourite pair of shoes that he was wearing that night, and as things are at present they would be of use only to a man with two right feet.

And all four of them are studying the economics of boot and shoe and glove manufacture. It is just possible that a factory with machines for making only right—or left—shoes and gloves might be cheaper to operate than one with machines for making pairs, although Willesden feels that rotating an endless succession of articles through one hundred and eighty degrees *and* the Fourth Dimension would be too much like hard physical labour for his taste.

George Whitley

Minute changes are constantly taking place along the numerous lines of evolution and somewhere in the world today the necessary alterations to human gene structure are being made which will eventually lead an even superior type of Man. But, would we ordinary 'normals' ever recognise the embryo superman?

FOR THE COLOUR OF HIS HAIR

By ARTHUR SELLINGS

He ran all the way home through the late summer afternoon, dodging the cracks between the paving-stones. But there was no dodging the shafts of sun, so dusty they seemed solid, that came swinging down at him between the high buildings as he passed. Each one made him flinch and provoked the next response in a muttered litany. Each response was the same—*Swine!*

What the responses punctuated was a string, not of prayers, but of a summoning of all the hurts of the day. He being what he was, they were many, because contact with everything and everybody was a hurt.

Like Charlie Pike who set and supervised the machine he worked on, swaggering around as a skilled man. Skilled! A ten-year old kid could have learned his job in three months. *Swine!*

And all the rest of them like Charlie Pike—big-headed, crafty, telling you dirty jokes you didn't understand and

mocking you because you didn't—or when you laughed, calling you a dirty little devil.

Swines !

And the girls who smiled at the men but laughed at *him*. Like today when Charlie Pike sent him to the stores for a left-handed inking roller. How could the creep know that the stores would be crowded then, so that the hooting and shrieking would carry above the clatter of machinery to his big stupid hairy ears ?

Bastards—all of them. And him, too, for falling for such an old one as that. And whoever had made a world as crazy as this one and made him and chucked him into it—

He stopped, panting, in the tenement hallway, grateful for its darkness after the glare of the streets. Then his nose wrinkled at the smell of disinfectant and yellow soap, and he went bounding up the stairs three at a time.

But at the first landing he cannoned into something big and invisible, and went sprawling. Exploding lights dazzled him.

Hands grabbed him and set him on his feet. The lights swirled away, and he saw a pair of grey eyes looking down at him.

"Now, Ernie," said a man's voice, quietly reproofing. "You shouldn't belt up the stairs like that. It might have been old Mrs. Ingham you crashed into, not me."

"They ought to be better lit," Ernie muttered sullenly. His eyes were adjusting now, so that he could make out lips smiling gently above him, but nothing else yet ; just eyes and lips set in shadow. Then he realised why, and therefore who. It was the caretaker, who was black-bearded. Ernie had hardly noticed him before. He was a quiet man who lived in the basement next to the furnaces he tended.

"Still, you want to be careful."

"Garn, think you own the place ?" He squirmed free of the hand that still rested on his shoulder. Then he stiffened, his eyes staring.

"What's the matter, Ernie ?"

"It's *you* !"

"That's right—Mr. Richards, the caretaker."

"No you're not, you're—" The boy looked round wildly for a way of escape, but he was trapped in a corner of the tiny landing. "Let me go."

The man looked puzzled. "Nobody's stopping you." He stepped aside.

Ernie made a dash for it. He ran all the way up to the fourth-floor flat where he lived. He opened the door with clawing fingers, slammed it shut and leaned back against it, gasping, his heart thudding.

"That you, Ernie?" His mother came out from the living room, clutching a copy of *Daring Confessions*. "Why, what-ever's the matter?"

"It's *him*!"

"Him? Who is?"

"The caretaker. He's really Hoskins, that probation officer, only he's changed his name and—"

He stopped abruptly, conscious that his terror had made him blurt out what he should have kept to himself. Grown-ups were in a conspiracy, weren't they? The way his mother was looking at him now, didn't that prove it?

His mother was really only genuinely puzzled. She knew kids were different these days—she'd read enough confession stories like *My Son Was A Rapist* and *I Was A High-School Call Girl*—but not *this* different.

"Of course he's not," she told him. "His name's Richards, and he doesn't look a bit like Mr. Hoskins."

"He doesn't *now*. He grew a beard. Course, that's very difficult—"

"Hey, don't be cheeky to your mother." It was his father, framed in the bedroom doorway, heaving a brace over a beefy shoulder. "Anyway, what's all the racket in aid of?"

"Nothing. It doesn't matter."

"He said Mr. Richards the caretaker is really Mr. Hoskins—you know, that nice probation officer in Tonbridge."

"What!" Ernie's father gave a spluttering sigh. "You think a man's going to chuck up a proper job like that just to—"

"I told you, it doesn't matter. Forget it."

"Do what? You little—" His father took a step toward him, but his mother intervened.

"Please, Tom. He didn't mean to be rude. He's upset. Look at his funny colour."

"I can't help my colour." *You're both a funny colour yourselves, a kind of purple*, he thought, but didn't dare say it. Instead he said, "Whyn't you leave me alone? If I say something, then want to take it back, I *can* take it back, can't I?"

"There's taking back and taking back," his father said

meaninglessly. "You can't go saying crazy things without making people wonder. You make *me* wonder, and I'm your father." He shook his head, as if his chief wonder was how that could ever have been. "But since I *am*, I like to know what goes on in that funny head of yours. Say the caretaker *is* the same man as the probation officer. So what? Do you think he's been sent in disguise specially to spy on you? *You?*" He guffawed. "A little tuppenny ha'penny hooligan and sneak thief."

"Tom—"

"Well, it's the best way. Who does he think he is?" He wheeled back to Ernie. "I'll tell you another thing, my boy. You're ungrateful as sin. That Mr. Hoskins was good to you. If it hadn't been for him, you'd have been sent to a reformatory. When I think of the way that man pleaded for you—"

"All *right*. I don't want to talk about it. I got a pain in the head."

"Ah, one of the famous headaches. The ones it took fifty-five specialists to find out weren't there at all. That's another example of the trouble people have been to, all on your account. It's no wonder income tax is what it is—you must have cost the country a small fortune."

Ernie shrugged off his father's heavy humour. "If I get pains in the head, I'm the only one who can tell. If people don't believe me, that's their lookout."

His father sighed. "All right, it's no good arguing with you. But why don't you try and pull yourself together?" Perhaps he knew that this was the phrase that infuriated his son most. Perhaps he said it to accent his role of suffering father, something to lend purpose to a life bounded by a heavy job and the working men's club and a dull wife. But if he knew, he didn't know that he knew. "We've done all we could for you. We even pulled up our roots and came to London, so as to give you a fresh start, so why—"

He was interrupted by something like the scream of a wounded animal, then an inchoate babble that finally separated into words. "To give *me* a fresh start! You came here to get away from the neighbours. And why don't you pull *yourself* together, you bloody old hypocrite? Why'd you have to talk to me the way you do? I'm sick of people talking to me. You don't understand. *I* don't understand, so I—I—"

The fear of tears blinding him, he brushed past his father and flew to his room. He locked the door behind him and hurled himself on the bed. He heard his father's angry voice saying things he couldn't make out, and his mother remonstrating with him.

Then there was silence, broken only by his father saying loudly, "I ought to take a strap to the young villain. He's not too old." But no heavy footsteps approached his door. Before long he heard a rattle of pans and dishes, then no more. His father was eating, getting ready for work on the night shift. His mother didn't call out for *him* to come and eat. She knew better than disturb the uneasy peace. She'd had experience.

Ernie heard all this, the words and the noises and the silence, with a tiny detached part of himself. The rest of his mind was going round and round, violently off-centre, in a whirl of thoughts and emotions—all of which added up to one emotion, *fear*, and one thought—

They're after me—

He didn't know who *they* were, any more than he knew why they were after him. But one thing he could swear; the caretaker *was* that probation officer. All right, so it wasn't likely—but why should that say he was wrong? All those long-nosed ginks who expected *this* and told him *that*—why did they think they were always right? Because there were so many of them and only one of him?

He got up from the bed and crossed to the window, leaning his elbows on the sill. He looked out over the city. A maze of slums separated the tenement from the lorries and buses and taxis that rumbled and clattered along the wider roads, so that their mingled voices came to him as one voice, growling and massive, over the nearer, smaller noises—children playing, babies bawling, somewhere a reedy old gramophone quavering—of the neighbourhood.

He listened with a kind of sick fascination. It was like a great machine. All the people, millions and millions of them, who lived and worked in it, were like blind cogs, clashing and grinding against each other; all to keep the machine going; not questioning, accepting it in a way that he couldn't. Why? They didn't know its purpose, for all their saying what was right and what was wrong.

He shivered. They might be stupid, but they *were* cogs, at

least, while he was—what?—only some bit of matter that shouldn't be there at all—something that snarled up everything and everybody round him? Well, he did, didn't he?

He hadn't realised that he had heard the flat door slam dully until he saw his father cross the tenement yard on his way to work. He looked so squat from up here, so smug and self-contained. Soon he would be at his place in the factory, doing the same stupid actions over and over again, till sunrise.

Then he saw somebody else. It was the caretaker, emerging from the door that led to the furnace room. He had a jacket over his overalls. He made his way across the yard, in the wake of Ernie's father.

Ernie leaped up, unlocked the door and dashed out.

His mother's face blinked up from a magazine. "Where are you going?"

"Out."

"I thought you had a headache."

He didn't stop to answer. He slammed the front door behind him and fled down the stairs, four at a time. He sprinted across the yard and stopped, panting, as he looked down the street.

He was just in time to see his father disappear round the far corner. As for the caretaker, he was merely strolling along. So he hadn't overtaken his father, spoken to him. Ernie relaxed, but only for a moment. Perhaps—

The caretaker stopped outside the pub on the corner, hesitated, then went in.

Yes, *now*. Ernie rushed back. Suddenly cautious, he slowed down to an ostentatiously casual stroll, whistling airily. Nobody seemed to be watching. He ducked into the furnace room doorway.

The caretaker's door was locked. But it was only a yale. He swore because he didn't have a bit of plastic on him. It would have to show a bit then. He raised his right leg and kicked sharply with the flat of his shoe. The door gave.

He bent the catch straight, closed the door behind him and started searching. Since the place was only barely furnished, it didn't take him long to reach what seemed to be the right place. The top right-hand drawer of a rickety chest was stuffed with papers. He began to riffle through them when he came across a thin book sandwiched between them. He took it out.

It was called *Doubts About Darwinism*. He shrugged and flipped through it in a gesture that, completed, would have returned it to its place. But it fell open as if to a page that had often been referred to. Sure enough, there was a passage marked with a long narrow red cross in each margin.

*"Take as an illustration the case of electric fishes. Now that they are in full possession of their electric batteries they doubtless enjoy the full benefit of the law of survival of the fittest, for no carnivorous animal who has once touched them will try the experiment again. But how long a time must the installation have taken if the ordinary flesh and nerves of the fish had to be converted into the materials of the battery? One is afraid to estimate through how many generations the accumulation of small variations must have gone on before the machine was completed. And during all this time the unfortunate fish must have been dragging about this heavy encumbrance (one third of the body of the *Gymnotus* is occupied by his battery) which must have considerably impeded him."*

The queer hobbies some people have! Ernie thought. Muttering, he thrust the book back among the papers and resumed his search.

He soon came to it. A whole batch of papers related to a Francis Aloysius—*dig that crazy name*, he thought, even at this moment of panic—Hoskins. Letters, papers, references, and—yes, one headed *To Whom It May Concern*: "*Mr. F. A. Hoskins was employed at Tonbridge as juvenile probation officer from . . . to . . . During this time he was hard-working, conscientious—*" *Blah blah blah.*

He put the papers back and closed the drawer. He began to tremble. It couldn't be coincidence. Whatever the reason for Hoskins coming here it had to do with *him*. And if it had to do with *him*—

Suddenly there were all kinds of voices in his head, faceless voices, whispering, muttering, jeering, *threatening*—

He fled blindly from the place, one idea seizing him. He had to get away, *right away*, as soon as he could.

He let himself in upstairs, striving desperately to calm himself, so as not to arouse suspicion. He need not have worried. A scrawled note on the table read *Gone round to Mrs. Franklin's. Your supper's in the oven.*

He threw clothes into a holdall. *Money*—he'd have to have money. He had a pound odd, a post office savings book with one more in. That wouldn't take him very far.

The vase ! He knew his mother kept money there. He pulled it down with shaking fingers and emptied it on the kitchen table. It was all in silver and coppers ; he couldn't stop to count it, but there must have been two pounds there. He shovelled it into his pocket.

But where else ? The gas meter. He took the handle of a wrench to the padlock, pulled out the box—and cursed luridly. It was empty. The stupid collector had had to pick *that* day ! In a fury of frustration he zipped his bag and fled.

It was almost dark as he set off through the streets. Before he had turned many corners he knew where he was going. Well, not *where*, maybe, but *how*. And he knew where he would start from. He turned left at Bridle Street, down Eli Place, through a gap in the fence—there was always a gap in the fence at Eli Place—and out onto the canal bank.

From here it was not far—past gaunt mills and warehouses, reflected swirlingly in the black water, under one bridge, two. He didn't even have to climb a wall. He sidled through a gateway. The goods yard stretched before him.

But which one of the hundreds of wagons to pick ? Several engines were shunting fussily, but he couldn't see any trains pulling out.

He skirted the yard. Then, hearing voices, he ducked behind a wagon. The voices, and the crunching of heavy boots, came nearer. Four feet planted themselves on the other side of the track. For a moment he feared the two men might be fitters, would bend down to inspect the undercarriage, and—

But the men only stayed a moment. “ Okay, Jack,” one of them said as the boots moved away. “ These go out tonight. You can move the tankers in here then.”

Ernie released his pent-up breath. After a while he came out from cover. The wagon he had been crouching behind was one of a long train. So it was going out tonight. But how far ? He found, on the side of the truck, a card in a holder. It read *Return to Newcastle*. A card on the next truck read the same.

Newcastle ? That was as good as anywhere. He heaved the door of a box wagon back, threw his bag up and scrambled after it. He pulled the door shut and settled down in the darkness. He took a cigarette out and puffed away awkwardly.

He'd done it ! Tomorrow morning he'd be miles away. The ease of it made his fears of the future less urgent. When he finished his cigarette, he lay there in the darkness, weaving fantasies of the kind of place that must be somewhere—perhaps

in Newcastle—a place where he fitted in, where he wouldn't have to steal or wreck things just to show stupid people what he thought of them. A place where there wouldn't *be* any stupid people. Where nobody was resented or misunderstood. Where—

His eyes closed . . .

He yelped and sat up violently.

“*Sh-hh—*”

A figure heaved itself through the open doorway.

Ernie began trembling, seized by nightmare. Against the night sky the silhouette was bearded.

“Go away, go away, go away,” he moaned, his voice rising.

“Listen to me, Ernie. I don't mean you any harm. Just listen—”

“I don't want to. Leave me alone, you—”

“If you don't shut that racket the railway police will hear and we'll both be for it. That's better. I only want to talk to you. After that, if you want to run away, you can go ahead.”

Ernie's eyes were suspicious gleams in the dimness of the wagon. He shrugged. “All right.”

“We can't talk here.”

“Where, then?”

“Down by the canal. Come on.”

They threaded their way back across the yard without being spotted. When they reached the canal the caretaker gestured Ernie to sit down on the sooty grass. He sat down by him. He cleared his throat.

“Now look, Ernie. Perhaps I did it wrong. I should have known you'd recognise me sometime. But try and understand. You may resent me, but—”

“Huh, you can say that again.”

“All right. But I promise you—if you do run away after I've said what I've got to say, I won't stop you. But . . . I shall have to follow.”

Ernie's eyes narrowed as a possible truth impinged. After all, he read the Sunday papers.

“Don't be silly.” The man smiled.

“Eh?” Ernie yelped, startled.

“Yes, I can sometimes. How do you think I found you just now?”

“Easy. You followed me.”

"You're right. But not by sight or sound. If I'd been in time for that I'd have caught up with you sooner. It's nearly eleven now. So I'll be as brief as I can. I'll start by telling you the bare truth. Which is—that you're something special."

"Garn—"

The man laughed.

"What are you laughing at, you stupid—"

"Now now, Ernie. I'm sorry. I was only laughing at the thought that you're not only something special, but probably the first one that ever *knew*. And all you can say is *Garn*. Famous first words!"

"Listen, if you're taking the micky—"

"Believe me, I'm not," the man said quickly. "This is too important. And I don't mean just to you or to me. I mean to everybody, the whole human race. No, don't interrupt. I'm not crazy. Look, you *know* you're different, don't you." It wasn't a question. "I know it's difficult for you to fit in. It isn't easy for anybody. But for you it's especially difficult, because of what you are."

"What am I?" The boy's voice was an urgent whisper, his craving for an answer swamping his suspicions.

"What you've always known yourself to be—something different. That's all. But it's a very important all. You see, the world's changing all the time. It always has been. Before there were buildings, machines, atomic power, there were just men, crouching in caves. Before that, no men at all. And long before that, just specks of life swarming in the seas. All this has come from just that."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Only that all the way along the line creatures like you have been popping up that have been different. Some have been inferior, so they've died out. But some have been bigger, stronger, better adapted to their surroundings. *They* survived, in fact triumphed over the ordinary members of the species, so that in several generations they *became* the species—but an improved version. Do you understand. Please try."

"I understand." Ernie said it savagely. "What would that make me? One that dies out?"

"Oh no. No indeed. You're a special kind. The kind that really matter. Not the ones that are just different in size or colour, but the ones that are *really* different. That in several

generations turn up with not just an improved species, but a radically different one.

"Science stumbles over your kind. A radical change—like a new organ, say—can't spring up overnight. It has to come gradually from generation to generation. And until the change is complete, until the organ is actually working, each creature in the chain is carrying a burden. It's not better fitted to survive. It's handicapped."

Ernie remembered the passage in the book in the drawer.

"And nobody," the man went on, "has been able to explain that one. Not satisfactorily. And apart from the organic handicap, there's another point. The rest of a tribe is quick to sense a difference. In fact, 'they're taking him to prison, for the colour of his hair.'"

"He-ah?" The boy's face looked white and startled.

The caretaker winced in self-reproach. "Sorry. I was rambling, quoting a poem that puts the same point. Nobody's going to do that to you if I can help it. And that's the point of it. The difference may call out resentment in most of the tribe, but in one—maybe more than one—it calls out the opposite, a protective compulsion. That's what I've got. I have to see that you survive, because your variation has got to be transmitted to the next generation, and from then on until it's complete."

Ernie was quiet in the semi-darkness. What he was being told was disturbing—disturbing in a way that made all the hurts and confusions of his life seem minor by comparison. It was like being yanked out of the familiar and being dumped in a whole new world. Yet it was the same world. Only it stretched away into terrifying landscapes. It was like coming out of a fog, seeing for the first time how really strange things were.

Seeing—

Yes, he could see—and understand. It was crazy, but real. It chimed with too many half-thoughts and fantasies to be disbelieved. Only somewhere stirred a thought that he was grasping at this explanation because he needed it, because it gave him an importance that he'd never had before. But the thought died before it surfaced. Another doubt was more insistent.

"How do you know all this?"

"I've read about it." He saw the look in the boy's eyes. "No, that isn't quite the truth. The reading came after. I *know*, that's all, but not by any way I'd ordinarily call knowing. I can't test it, prove it. It's like . . . like being told."

"Told? Who by?"

"Do I have to say? Isn't it enough that you understand your position? You don't have to understand mine."

The boy's eyes were unwavering on him.

"All right." He sighed. "Two years¹ ago, when I first came in contact with you, I resented you, too. So strongly that I had to take a hold on myself. You can't let feelings like that interfere with the kind of job I was doing. But suddenly there was a violent reaction. I knew I had to protect you. And I didn't care then how *that* interfered with my job.

"I know the torments you've suffered. But you're not the only one. I'd always been pretty sure of myself; I'd made my own terms with the world. And then this happened. I tried to analyse it. I imagined all kinds of things. Anyway, in the end . . . and I think it was *because* I was so desperate . . . the answer came."

"But how? From where?"

"Hell, but this is difficult! Truths like this don't come in words, but images. Let me try and put it this way. All those changes from the beginning are like tracks . . . tracks through a forest. At the year dot there was just one track. Then things started to evolve and millions of tracks opened up. And when creatures started to think, the tracks multiplied and multiplied until now—there's almost an infinity of them.

"Some were dead-ends, and a lot of creatures and people and nations went the wrong way and were never seen again. Perhaps there's just one right way. Perhaps there are several. Perhaps—"

The caretaker stopped. "Why am I telling you this? It must sound like a fairy-tale."

"I-I used to like fairy-tales. When I was a kid. I used to wish that . . . that they were the truth—" The boy broke off abruptly, conscious of having opened up in a way he had never done in all his life before.

The man smiled as if gratified, as if knowing that his task would not be so difficult now.

"In some ways they are. People have always had an inkling of the truth, that and all kinds of truth, and they've cast them

into myths. Then the myths have become fairy-tales, because civilised people couldn't bear to believe them seriously. People have always known about the path through the forest. Like Hansel and Gretel. And of people like you . . . the Ugly Duckling. As for me . . . I don't know . . . I'm the faithful old servant, I suppose. Or—" he laughed—"the fairy god-mother." He became serious. "Though I'm afraid I can't work any spells for you."

"But how about who told you? Who are they?"

"I think *they* are the ones at the end of the road. The ones who live in the shining castle. Only they and the castle aren't there yet. They're only there when *we* get there. And maybe it's not the end of the road, but only the end of the first stretch. Whatever it is, whoever *they* are . . . or will be . . . or only may be . . . they want to see us reach them in the end, to *become* them, so that they can become real. Until they are, they can't do anything about it. They can only let themselves be glimpsed—far-off, to let people like me know where they're going and why."

"So everyone there's ever been like you has known?"

"No, I don't think so. I think I've been allowed a glimpse of the truth only because I was so tortured. Your role and mine, they both become more difficult the more complex the world. Blind animals obey the compulsion because they must, because their problems are only physical. But I had to be given some intelligent reason."

"Then why wasn't I?"

"You have been. I've just given it to you."

"No, I mean—"

"I know what you mean. But I wouldn't worry about that, if I were you."

Ernie wasn't going to accept that, but was suddenly diverted by a thought that had got lost in all this. But it was more important to him than all the rest.

"Just how am I different? What's it going to turn out as?"

"That I don't know. I've had your medical history through my hands. There's nothing that doctors can measure. Maybe it's just a few cells in you that are sensitive—in some new way. Whatever it is, nobody will ever know until it's completed." He put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You won't get any medals, son."

Suddenly moved to a point where he dared not show it, the man got to his feet.

"I wish I hadn't had to tell you." He spoke as if addressing the jagged skyline rather than Ernie. "Telling you may bring new problems. But I didn't have any alternative."

Ernie got up, too.

"Well," the man said. "Are you still going to run away?"

The boy scowled. "It's not much good, is it?"

"No."

The hooting of a train faded into forlorn distances.

"There's only one thing wrong."

"Don't worry. I'll settle things at home."

"Hah, you don't know all the time, do you? I didn't mean that. It's . . . well, all this talk about being different and passing it on. It sounds all right, except for one thing. I won't have any kids." He looked down at his feet, scuffing one in the dust. "People don't like me. People . . . include girls."

"You'll find somebody. Or somebody will find you."

"You give me the creeps. You're so sure."

"I am on that point. Well, coming?"

Ernie picked up his bag.

They walked in silence along the towpath. They reached Eli Place and the hole in the fence. Ernie stopped to go through, then straightened.

"I think I know. Why you were told and I wasn't."

"Yes?"

"Because it's harder for you. You had to throw your job up. You'll have to be doing that kind of thing all the time. I mean . . . whatever I am, I *am*. But you . . . it's hard to explain. I mean—"

"I know what you mean," the man said simply. "It's not just your problem any more. That's all I've been trying to say."

Arthur Sellings

Richard Argyle, singled out for destruction by the Galaxy's first teleport, finds it an impossibility to fight this mysterious being who can move from place to place at a moment's notice. But the big mystery is why Argyle is being persecuted. This story is Lan Wright at his very best.

A MAN CALLED DESTINY

By LAN WRIGHT

Part Two of Three Parts

FOREWORD

Richard Argyle, maintenance engineer on the spaceship Lady Dawn trading between the stars, is temporarily stranded on Jones' Planet when the drive unit is broken. Off duty he explores the local town of Jonesville where he is approached by a man named Spiros who offers him a job with the Company Dellora, one of the largest trading combines in the galaxy.

Argyle is suspicious but becomes alert when Spiros mentions that he knows Argyle has not seen his wife Angela for eight years and informs him that during this time she has been working for the Company, although she is now dead. Pietro Dellora, head of the Company, wants Argyle to visit him as soon as possible. Unable to make up his mind, Argyle says that he will contact Spiros at the Hotel Galactica on Rigel Five when his ship reaches there.

Three weeks later the repaired Lady Dawn reaches the planet and Argyle enquires for Spiros at the hotel and is immediately involved with Lawman Sworder, head of the Rigellian Crime Squad—Spiros had been found murdered that morning under mysterious circumstances, possibly by someone who had mastered teleportation although this example of the psi powers was so far unknown in the galaxy, despite the fact that there were telepaths, pyrotics, and telekins working for the good of humanity. Spiros had been a telepath and this fact decides Argyle to visit Pietro Dellora.

He takes ship for the planet Dellora and upon arrival at the spaceport is interrogated by a security officer and told to stay at the Hotel Dellora until sent for. Two nights later he is taken by spaceship to one of the planet's artificial satellites and comes face to face with Pietro Dellora, a gross mountain of human flesh whose bloated bulbous body could only survive in zero-gravity. Dellora's mind, however, was vastly different to his body and Argyle warms to the brilliant brain imprisoned in the mountain of flesh. Dellora is shocked to learn of Spiros's death and informs Argyle that there are certain elements loose in the galaxy bent on destroying Earth as a great Power. He also explains that Angela had the gift of precognition and had left Argyle because of what she knew lay in the future. She had met her death in a spaceship disaster probably engineered by the mysterious forces now trying to disrupt the commerce of the galaxy.

Argyle leaves Pietro without accepting a job with him. Later in his hotel he is awakened by a mysterious intruder who warns him not to meddle in his affairs and asks about a certain Preacher Judd, a person completely unknown to Argyle. After the intruder disappears Argyle finds a thin poisoned needle in the pillow beside his head. In a panic he disposes of it down the waste chute.

The next morning he is awakened by three Army officers who search his room and find a needle gun, produce the dart he had disposed of, and tell him Pietro Dellora was murdered during the night by just such a gun—and Argyle was the last to see him alive! Placed under open arrest, Argyle is confined to the city limits, a sonic transmitter being chained to his wrist which records his whereabouts at Police HQ. Watching a TV news-cast Argyle sees a picture of Pietro's son Alfredo who is on his way to the planet—and is horrified to identify him as the teleport intruder. Realising he must escape from Dellora Planet he mingles with the evening crowds and eventually attacks a police-

man, changes clothes with him, breaks the chain holding the sonic transmitter and reaches the spaceport before the alarm is raised.

He manages to stow away on the spaceship which brought him to the planet, but with the alarm on all ships are grounded. The ship is searched many times and, just when he begins to feel safe, the inspection hatch covering his hiding place in the ship's hull is opened and a torch shines down on him.

VIII

The light from the torch seemed to hang in the blackness of Argyle's hiding place for an eternity. At last, when he felt that he would scream with the futility of it all, the torch was withdrawn.

"Empty," said an echoing voice with some disgust.

"I told them he couldn't possibly have got this far," said another. "Dammit, it was barely five minutes after the Computer gave the alarm that we picked up that patrol-man in the bushes back of Massena Street."

"Well, he's got to be somewhere. I wouldn't be in the Commandant's shoes if we don't get him before Alfredo Dellora gets here."

The hatch clanged back into place and was screwed down. Argyle breathed again. He could draw all sorts of conclusions from the snatch of conversation he'd heard. Apparently it was common talk in the Security Forces that Alfredo Dellora wanted to see him very badly indeed. That could mean only one thing. His guess was right that Alfredo intended pinning the murder of his father firmly and squarely on Argyle's shoulders.

The hours passed slowly. He had no means of knowing the time or of judging how he could ration out his tiny reserves of food and water. His mouth was parched and dry and all he dare do after enduring it as long as he could was to moisten his lips and tongue with a few precious drops. His meal consisted of two vitamin pills. He tried to sleep as much as he could, but he could only doze in fits and starts as his muscles protested against the ill-treatment forced on them.

The darkness was oppressive and he found claustrophobia looming up to add to his troubles. Time became a lost thing.

Hunger and thirst were part of his being, and his mind lost the capacity for any action but the recognition of discomfort.

Hours passed.

Hunger became a physical pain that tablets could not assuage, and thirst cracked his lips and dried his tongue. His moments of lucidity became fewer and fewer, yet some strange bodily mechanism kept him from doing the obvious thing—getting out of his self-imposed prison. He held on and hoped.

Time passed in a haze of discomfort as his mind sank deeper into tunnels of delirium and despair.

The churning below of the booster pumps brought clarity to his brain and hope to his heart. They woke him from his stupor with their methodic rumbling and he lay in his hiding place in an agony of anticipation. In the engine room above him the muffled sounds of men at work echoed down through the deck plates. The boosters slowed and died ; Argyle waited in an agony of suspense in case he had been misled, and then, low, steady, throbbing through the whole body of the ship, he felt the great engines pulsing out their power in preparation for takeoff. The sounds grew stronger and a shudder ran through the metal around him. The ship began to move, he could feel it throbbing and pulsing around him and plainly came the feel of the upward lift as she rose towards the heavens.

Argyle wondered dazedly where he stored the liquid that enabled him to shed tears of relief.

He settled himself grimly to more hours of waiting, for he dared not break cover until he was clear of Dellora Planet. It was a five-week trip back to Rigel Five. He had plenty of time.

There followed more hours of agony and discomfort. His water supply had long since run out, and the few vitamin tablets he had left could do nothing to ease the ache in his stomach. His muscles were lances of fire that sent pain ripping through him every time he moved. He forced himself to hang on until to hang on further meant death. He could not go on.

He squeezed himself out of the mass of cable and pipe and groped upward to the inspection hatch. Any ideas he might have had that he could, alone, move the bolts holding the hatch in position, were quickly dispelled. They had been screwed in from above and he had neither the leverage nor the strength to move them from below. He managed to take off one of his shoes, and, weakly, began to hammer at the metal above his

head. For a long time nothing happened, and then footsteps came and with them voices which boomed dully through the deck plates. From the echoes he could tell of the surprise and concern of their owners. He hammered again, louder and in a sudden desperate panic to get out of this cramped hole before he died of sheer suffocating claustrophobia.

The bolts above him turned and the hatch was lifted aside.

A voice that was high with wonder and surprise, shouted, "Hey, will you come and look at this?"

Hands reached down and lifted him out.

"Hell, he stinks," remarked another.

Argyle tried to speak but his tongue was too swollen and his mouth too dry. He could only croak.

"He looks in a bad way," said another, "Better get him up to the sick bay and call for the skipper to look at him."

"I guess this must be the guy they were looking for back on Dellora."

"Huh, by the look of him he'd be better off in gaol. Come on up, feller. Lets get you cleaned up."

Argyle managed to get to his feet with an arm supporting him on each side—and then he fainted.

He awoke with a bunk soft under his still aching body, and lights bright above him. He moved a little, stretching his muscles and trying to ease the ache in them.

"Awake?" The voice was gruff and familiar.

He squinted in the light and made out the familiar black beard of the freighter skipper.

Argyle laughed slightly and nodded. "Yes, I'm awake."

"What in hell were you doing in the inspection chamber?"

"Can't you guess?" countered Argyle grimly.

"Yeah. Yeah, I reckon I can. Dellora's security men almost took the ship apart three times looking for you." He pointed a horny finger at Argyle. "I warned you before you landed not to cross their path, mister."

"And now—what?" Argyle eased himself into a sitting position. The ship's captain eyed him sombrely. "That depends."

"Do you know why I was wanted?"

"Sure. Who doesn't?"

"Are you taking me back to Dellora?"

The man gazed at him in silent contemplation for a long minute. "I haven't changed course yet," he said at last.

"How far out are we?"

"Four days. We were three days late leaving."

Argyle felt suddenly physically sick. He had been in that hole for almost nine days, and now—

"You don't have to turn back," he said.

The skipper said nothing.

"When we get to Rigel Five call the law there and hand me over to them if you think I had anything to do with Pietro Dellora's murder."

"Murder?" The skipper's black eyes flashed at him in sudden alarm, "Who said anything about murder?"

Argyle blinked in surprise. "But—but you said you knew why I was wanted by the security squads? They—they told you, didn't they?"

"Sure, they told me you were wanted for robbery with violence. Though I must admit I couldn't see what a feller like you wanted to do that for."

Argyle relaxed in his bunk. So, another factor had entered into the arena. Dellora's security men didn't want to broadcast who was responsible for the murder of old Pietro. Why? Because Alfredo had told them not to. And why had Alfredo told them not to? Because he didn't want the news to break outside Dellora Planet—at least, not until Argyle was safely tried and convicted and put out of the way.

"What's this about murder?" insisted the skipper belligerently.

"You knew old Pietro was dead? Murdered?"

The man nodded.

"I am the one who was supposed to have done it."

"But they said—"

"Story invented for home consumption."

"Well, well. They don't change much on Dellora. Tricky as a pack of Venusian weasels."

"I want to get to Rigel Five," Argyle insisted urgently.

"Once I'm there you can hand me over to the law—preferably to Lawman Sworder—that's how guilty I think I am. But if you turn back to Dellora, well, I'm a dead duck."

The skipper sat and eyed him, pondering the idea. Clearly, he had no love for the authorities on Dellora, and that might be the one factor which would swing him on to Argyle's side.

"All right," he nodded at last. "I'll take a chance. I wouldn't naturally do a damn thing to help those buzzards. They did me dirt too often for me to treat 'em like brothers. Like I said, when you're in Dellora territory you're in the middle of trouble."

Argyle relaxed. His troubles slipped away from him as he realised that his gamble had come off. His nine days of suffering had not been in vain. He was clear of Dellora Planet, and whatever trouble lay ahead would be dealt with without the additional handicap of having a whole world stacked against him. For the first time in what seemed to be ages, he felt free.

IX

Argyle kept to himself for the entire trip to Rigel Five. The first few days were spent in the ship's tiny sick bay getting over the effects of his self-imposed confinement. That took a little time. He could not go straight on to solid foods as painful experience taught him. He had to move slowly towards complete physical rehabilitation, and when that was accomplished he mixed only with the officers, and then only at meal times. The rest of the time he spent in the same cabin that he'd occupied on the outward trip. He read books and months' old journals from all parts of the Galaxy that were, in themselves, a rough guide and chart to the wanderings of the ship and her crew.

The tough, black-bearded captain didn't bother him, save to assure him at the outset he would most certainly hand him over to the person of Lawman Sworder on arrival.

"I don't want to get in worse with the Dellora Company than I'm likely to be already," he explained, and Argyle was satisfied.

He stood on the bridge control as they came in to land at one of the minor space fields on the planet city of Rigel Five. He listened abstractedly as the skipper took the landing instructions from the control tower, and passed his own cargo lists for customs inspection and marketing authorities.

He pricked up his ears and turned to look at the captain as the man went on, "Special message for onward transmission to Lawman Sworder of the Rigel Law Enforcement Corps. Confirm if acceptable."

He saw Argyle looking at him and he smiled briefly and humourlessly as he waited for the confirmation to come back.

"Request that Lawman Sworder be on hand at the time of landing to take over responsibility for a suspected felon who stowed away aboard ship on Dellora Planet."

Argyle felt tension return to his body for the first time in weeks as the official confirmation came back. He knew that the ship's captain was only covering himself against the future, but nevertheless it didn't do him much good to hear himself described as a suspected felon.

"Don't worry," said the skipper gruffly, almost as if he could read Argyle's thoughts. "I've got to cover myself in the official records."

"Yes, sure. That's all right."

He wondered what action Sworder would take. At least it was not likely that he would be sent back to Dellora on a charge of armed robbery once he had told his own story to Sworder. A sudden return of memory concerning Dellora made him turn to the captain who stood beside him, intent on the landing routine for bringing in his ship.

"Say, skipper. Did you ever hear of a man called Preacher Judd?"

The other frowned. "Judd? Nope, can't say I have—wait a minute, though. Preacher Judd? Name seems familiar." A frown of concentration creased his leathery face. "Preacher Judd. Seems like I heard of a politician named Judd some years back when I last hit Terra. Don't know if that's the same feller. Yeah, I'm sure his name was Judd. Don't know about the Preacher part of it, though."

Argyle nodded his thanks. A politician? And on Earth? Well, it didn't seem a very likely choice. Why should Alfredo Dellora assume that he, Richard Argyle, should be on speaking terms with a politician? He put the matter from his mind.

After they landed Argyle went to his cabin and waited with mounting tension for the arrival of Lawman Sworder. He didn't have long to wait.

The gruff voice of the captain in the corridor saying, "In there, Lawman," gave warning of Sworder's coming. He slid open the cabin door and stepped inside with a light, unstartled smile spread across his square-jawed face.

"I had a feeling it would be you, Argyle," he said.

They shook hands and Argyle remarked, "I never thought I'd be glad to see the Law."

"Oh, we have our uses in these law times." He sat down on the edge of the bunk. "Well, what's the trouble. What's all this about a suspected felon?"

"You mean no word has come through from Dellora Planet?"

"About you? No."

Argyle pursed his lips. The only reason which would account for that was lack of a teepee on Dellora to relay the news. Unless—

"We heard about the murder of old Pietro," remarked Sworder quietly.

"Teepee?"

"How else? Look, I don't know what sort of trouble you're in, Argyle, but you'd better let me in on it from the beginning. Last I knew you were headed for Dellora to see Pietro and find out about your wife. Suppose you go on from there."

"It adds up to one very unpleasant fact, Sworder," said Argyle grimly. "I am supposed to have murdered Pietro Dellora."

Sworder sat quiet and digested the information without any show of horror or surprise.

"I can only assume that you didn't do it," he commented at last.

"Well, I'm glad someone believes me. How do you figure that?"

"We'd have a request to hold you on arrival here—and so would every other planet to which ships from Dellora were headed. As we've had no such request I can only assume that someone wants to hush the matter up for a reason best known to themselves. Let's have the rest of it."

As quickly and concisely as he could Argyle went through the maze of events that had entrapped him since he left Rigel Five. Sworder listened without comment until Argyle finished, and then he picked up the one fact that Argyle had withheld.

"This teleport—you think he's the one who killed Spiros?"

"I'm sure of it."

"But why should he kill Spiros?"

"Because he wanted to prevent Spiros getting to me and dragging me into whatever is going on. You know, and I know, he was too late."

"In other words, he didn't want you to meet Pietro Dellora."

"That's right. Though why, I haven't got around to puzzling out as yet. I need more facts and more details. I need to know what is at the back of the whole stinking business before I'll be able to tie in these other threads."

"I suppose you know who the teleport is," remarked Sworder softly.

Argyle nodded and grinned as he did so.

"I thought you might. Well?"

"His name is Alfredo Dellora."

Sworder's black eyes flashed at him in sheer incredulous surprise. He whistled soundlessly. "No wonder you wanted to get off Dellora Planet before he got there."

"He assumed one odd thing, Sworder, when he first visited me in that cabin on the space station. He assumed I knew a man known as Preacher Judd."

"Preacher Judd?"

"Yes, ever heard of him?"

Sworder leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees.

"How long since you were last on Earth, Argyle?" he asked.

"Oh, five—nearly six years I guess. Why?"

Sworder nodded. "Armadeus Judd—Preacher Judd to the average man—is the President of the Terran Grand Council."

"What?" Argyle felt as surprised as he must have looked.

"Dammit, Sworder, I don't know much about politics, but I'd remember a name like that if I'd heard it ten years ago—"

"You wouldn't have," interrupted Sworder calmly. "Judd seems to be a very remarkable man. He's come up fast. Ten years ago he was an unknown minor politician—a delegate to the Central Terran Government for some small and unimportant community; five years ago he suddenly sprang into prominence. In less than a year something happened to him—he became a giant in stature, someone to rank with the great men of history. Some say he's already greater than most, but I wouldn't know about that. I do know he's one of the most powerful men outside the Traders in the Galaxy. He's got the reputation of being a miracle worker, someone who'll pull Earth's chestnuts out of the fire before she's gone too far down the line." He shrugged. "I don't see why Alfredo Dellora should assume you know a man like Judd."

Argyle sat silent and puzzled. No wonder Alfredo hadn't believed him when he said he'd never heard of Judd, but that did not answer the greater question which Sworder had already stated. Why should Dellora think that Argyle was on speaking terms with a man of Judd's position and importance?

"Know what I should do in your shoes, Argyle?"

He cocked an eye at the Lawman. "What?"

"Head for Earth. Try to see Judd. And see what happens."

"What about the murder charge?"

Sworder shrugged. "We don't know anything about it. And by their own admission to the skipper of this freighter they only want you for robbery with violence." He shook his head. "I can't see Alfredo pressing the matter in the circumstances. He might get his fingers burnt."

"Huh, and he might not."

Sworder leaned forward and stared grimly at Argyle. "I don't think you've realised just what's going on around you, Argyle," he said.

"Don't I, hell," snapped Argyle. "I've been in nothing but trouble ever since Spiros caught up with me on Jones."

"That isn't what I mean. You and your late wife and Pietro and Alfredo—yes, and Preacher Judd, too—are all mixed up in something that isn't just another game of crossed identities. Something is going on that isn't very pleasant for anyone concerned. It's important enough for a man in Alfredo Dellora's position to commit two murders—one of the victims his own father. It's important enough for him to have a third murder marked against his name unless I'm very much mistaken."

"A third?"

"Your wife."

Argyle felt a cold band of horror settle round his stomach. Angela was back in the picture again.

"I don't think you're very safe whatever you do, if only because you're the only person who can identify the murderer of old Pietro. What other reason there may be I wouldn't know, but I think it's about time you started looking out for yourself and carrying the fight to the enemy." He shrugged, "Of course, you can always sit around and wait for Alfredo to catch up with you—and he will, make no mistake about that."

Argyle sat still and shaken on the end of the bunk. Every word that Swarder had spoken had hit home with the force of a physical blow. He hadn't thought about it in that light before. He hadn't even connected Angela with the murderous Alfredo. He'd thought, quite wrongly and rather stupidly, that once he was off Dellora Planet then everything would be all right, and he was so very wrong. He was within reach of

Alfredo Dellora anywhere in the Galaxy, provided Alfredo had a good idea where he was at any given moment.

A sudden tremor of fear ran through him. How did you fight a teleport ?

"Come on ashore," said Sworder abruptly, breaking his reverie. "Let's get you settled in an hotel, then we'll worry about what to do next."

Argyle smiled wanly and nodded his silent agreement.

He chose a smaller, less pretentious establishment than the Hotel Galactica—the Stellar Hotel not far from the block of apartments in which Sworder lived, and that gave him feeling of added security. He needed friends at the moment, and the Lawman certainly wasn't an enemy.

He spent that afternoon and evening settling in, replenishing his wardrobe, and making sure that his credit with the Inter-Stellar Bank was still good even though he had left his record book in his kit on Dellora Planet. Here, Sworder was a great help and by late evening he felt once more re-established in a sane and sensible community.

The following day he met Sworder for lunch in a quiet restaurant not far from the Lawman's office, and as they sat in the bar over a pre-lunch drink, Sworder asked, "Thought any more about what I said to you yesterday on board that ship?"

Argyle nodded. "Some," he admitted.

"And?"

"I don't know, I just don't know. I'm not cut out for this whole rotten business."

"Few of us are."

"I suppose not. Truthfully, Sworder, I've been frightened on more occasions in the past three or four months than I've been in my whole life before. All I want to do is live quietly and leave people severely alone. I want another ship and a good long trip across the Galaxy—"

"The penance of work, eh?"

Argyle nodded. "Something like that."

"Is that what you're going to do?"

"I don't know. I've got a feeling that you're probably right about Alfredo Dellora, but I can't help thinking that if I don't do anything against his interests then he may leave me alone—and that's all I want."

There was a long silence while Sworder examined the swilling contents of his glass with myopic intensity.

"It won't work out that way, you know."

"Why shouldn't it?"

"Because criminals never admit to themselves that other people might possess the ethics they lack. Dellora won't trust you because he knows no one would trust him."

"Why shouldn't they?"

"Another failing in the criminal mind. Their sense of personal guilt, though practically lost in the subconscious, is always transferred to the person or persons they think is against them. In this case Dellora knows you are against him—"

"But I'm not, all I want—"

"Is to be left alone. Sure, but Dellora won't trust such a motive because he would turn such knowledge to his own advantage if he were in your shoes. And he credits you with the same outlook."

Argyle sat silent. The cold knot of fear that had vanished over night was back with him again. Deep within him he knew that Sworder was probably right. But still—

"Let's eat," he said abruptly. "I'm starving."

After lunch he went back to his hotel and spent the afternoon in his room worrying and wondering.

By the next morning his thoughts has coalesced into a definite desire for action. He reasoned that if he did nothing then Dellora might leave him alone. If that happened, well, the gamble would be worth the effort. After breakfast he took an aircab across the city to the Central Registry for Space Officers. He signed in as a first-class engineer wanting a berth on an independent vessel. He gave his registration number, records reference, and a bowdlerised story to account for his lost records.

The registry clerk eyed him dubiously and with some despair.

"You realise we shall have to check all those particulars before we issue you with new documents?"

"Naturally," agreed Argyle.

"That'll take time. We shall need retina patterns, fingerprints, blood count—the usual formalities."

Argyle sighed. "Sure. It's my own fault."

"Take about a week to check, and then we can put you down for a ship. All right?"

Argyle smiled wryly. "I haven't much choice."

It took over two hours for all the formalities to be completed, and it was late afternoon before he returned to his hotel. He washed, changed, and then spent the rest of the evening at a

tridi-theatre, more to fill in time than to amuse himself. The next day was much the same. He lunched again with Sworder and told him that he had applied to the registry for a berth on an outward bound sh.p.

Sworder expressed no surprise. He commented briefly that he hoped Argyle would enjoy the experience and changed the subject. Argyle went back to his hotel in an odd state of gloom and indecision. He had known beforehand what Sworder's reaction would be, and he knew, too, that the Lawman's only concern was for his welfare. Which was odd considering the fact that they had met only about four times.

The evening he spent in a bar drinking, and dancing with a couple of unaccompanied stewardesses who were off duty from one of the great passenger cruisers. It was midnight when, a little the worse for drink, he slumped wearily into bed.

Sleep came quickly but not too well. He was restless and fitful throughout the night, his mind disturbed by nightmares and haunted by phantom dreams of fantastic worlds. He dreamed of Dellora and of Angela, as he had so often done in the past weeks, but now the dreams were ugly, half demented things that flitted through his tortured mind on ghost wings, alien and insidious. They ended when he fell through a suffocating black hole in eternity—a dark, ominous cloud that shrouded all thoughts and all dreams from his fretful mind, so that only deep unconsciousness possessed his mind.

When he awoke the light of the Rigel sun poured through the window into his room.

Argyle could remember headaches he had suffered before, but this was like no other that he could even imagine. It throbbed in time to the beating of his heart with a dull insistent pounding that shredded his nerves with the sheer, unending agony of it. His mouth was a sewer of nauseous fur, his tongue dry and swollen. There was an odd odour in the room too, not strong, but dying slowly as the air-conditioning plant dealt with it. He sniffed at it uncertainly and strove to place it from the record of his memory. The effort was too much in his present state.

He got off the bed and staggered into the toilet room. A quick douche of cold water over his head and a mouthwash made some impression on his discomfort and he went back into the bedroom feeling, if not entirely well, at least better than he had before.

On the table beside the bed, and in full view, lay an empty hypodermic syringe.

For an instant the fact didn't register. He thought dimly, what an odd thing to find beside your bed? And then his stomach turned over with the horror of realisation; someone had put it there, and that person had got into his room and drugged him during the night.

Memory flooded back to him as he recalled the odour he had noticed bare minutes before when first he awoke. Someone had got into his room and drugged him and then—

He rolled up the sleeve of his night garment in sudden a'arm, and there, just above the elbow in the fleshy part of his upper arm was the telltale red pinprick which marked the insertion point of the syringe.

He didn't need to think twice about who the person involved might be. It seemed that Alfredo Dellora specialised in night visits. And it proved that Lawman Swarder was right in his estimate of the situation—Alfredo Dellora did not intend to leave Argyle alone.

He shivered as he sat on the edge of the bed. The whole business was wildly improbable. Why had he been drugged? Obviously, to inject something into him. By why leave evidence that something had been injected? Without the hypodermic he might very well have not even known that the drugging and injection had taken place. Unless, of course, Alfredo wanted him to know that he had been injected with some drug or other.

Almost anxiously he wondered how he felt. He concentrated on his bodily reactions. True, he felt as if he'd been drugged, but it was wearing off as the minutes passed. He didn't feel tired or drowsy or sick or ill now. He held his hands out before him and could see only a slight nervous waver to the fingers.

The whole business was utterly ridiculous. What was it Swarder said? He, Argyle, was the only person who could identify the murderer of old Pietro, therefore Alfredo would want him out of the way. He went cold as an ugly thought struck him that he might drop dead at any minute as a result of Alfredo's hypo.

A knock on the door disturbed his thoughts, and he called, "Who is it?"

"Message, sir, from the main desk."

He crossed to the door and opened it. A wide-eyed, native porter handed him an envelope.

"Arrived this morning, sir."

"Thanks." Argyle nodded absently and closed the door. He sat down on the bed again and broke the seal on the envelope. A single sheet of paper fell out and he unfolded it. On it was one line of neat script :

"Analyse it, Argyle, and then wait until you hear further from me."

There was no signature.

Bewildered he turned the paper over, but there was nothing more on the other side. Analyse it? Analyse what? Almost without thinking his eyes turned to the slim, gleaming form of the hypo needle. There were a few drops of dull yellow liquid in it, not much but enough for a competent chemist to take an analysis without much trouble. It was the unwritten threat behind that single line of writing that worried him even more than the fact that the contents of the needle might be dangerous. Clearly, Dellora didn't expect him to drop dead within the next few hours, but that was small comfort.

Argyle dressed and had a hasty breakfast in the hotel restaurant. He wrapped the syringe in a small box and turned up the classified trades directory to the city. There were several analytical chemists listed, all of them Terran, but most of them specialists in one particular branch, metallurgy, chemistry and various other branches of what seemed at first sight an uncomplicated profession. He chose a chemical analyst not far from the hotel and away from the main trading thoroughfares.

C. S. Ramchand turned out to be a dark-skinned Terran, bald, and with a tubby, jovial face that was denied by a pair of large mournful eyes set behind old-fashioned metal-rimmed spectacles which Argyle hadn't seen worn in years.

He eyed the tiny sample in the syringe with some misgiving as Argyle handed it to him and explained what he wanted.

"There isn't much to work on," he complained.

"I know. Still—?"

The man shrugged. "I will do the best I can. If you will call back this afternoon I will give you a preliminary report."

"I have a feeling," remarked Argyle grimly, "that a preliminary report is all I shall want."

When he returned late in the afternoon Ramchand greeting him with a taut alarm that he could feel as soon as he went into the office.

"Ah, Mister Argyle. Where did you get this syringe?" were his first words.

Argyle went straight on to the defensive. Alfredo Dellora had hardly meant that he should broadcast all the details to anyone who happened to ask. He said, "All I want to know is what is in it, Mister Ramchand. That's what I'm paying you for."

"It is not as easy as that—"

"Why? My money's good?"

The man waved his hands in sudden agitation. "It is not that—"

Argyle's nerves were in no condition to engage upon an argument.

"Look, Ramchand, I paid you to do a job. That job was to tell me what was in that syringe. That's all, brother. Nothing else comes into it. Now. Talk."

Ramchand shook his head in something approaching desperation. "You do not understand, Mister Argyle. This syringe contained what we call a selective poison. That is one which is bred from special culture strains, and which will most certainly prove fatal within a matter of a week or ten days unless an antidote is used."

"What is the antidote?" asked Argyle grimly.

"There isn't one."

"What?"

"In the case of a selective poison, Mister Argyle, the antidote is bred from the same bacteria culture as the poison—that is the only way it can be made in time to save the life of any person who has the poison used on him."

X

He walked back to the hotel, sick and shaken. He needed time to think, and he needed the open air and people not too far distant from him. A psychologist would have recognised the crowd-instinct which stemmed from his personal insecurity. The gardens were wide, open spaces, small parks with large areas of clipped green grass, obviously imported from Earth. He walked round for more than an hour while the Rigel sun dipped lower in the sky and was finally lost to view behind the towering bulks of the mighty buildings all round. There was no horizon on the planet city.

By the time he reached his hotel he knew there was only one thing he could do. Wait, and see ! The conviction he had that Dellora would be contacting him didn't help improve his state of mind. There was something ugly and unclean in knowing that his body carried within it, at this very moment, the seeds of destruction carefully sown by someone who wanted that destruction.

Blackmailers used it, Ramchand had said. It seemed an almost foolproof method of blackmailing someone—anyone. Life was precious to all who could enjoy it, and Argyle could imagine the haste with which they would part with large sums of money to obtain an antidote to such a loathsome creation.

He ate a light meal in the hotel restaurant and went up to his room to wait. Nothing happened, and no one came.

In the morning he felt ill, and he had no means of knowing whether it was the psychological factor or whether, indeed, the poison was having its effect. He ate no breakfast, and went straight to the bar when it opened to spend the time until lunch sampling large portions of Terran brews in an attempt to improve his lowered state of mind. It didn't help, instead he became ill-tempered and maudlin. He went to the hotel desk to see if any message had come for him and cursed the native clerk in fluent tones when the answer was 'no'. Lunch was something he couldn't face, and he staggered up to his room and sank face down on his bed in a drunken stupor which kept him out of action until late evening.

It took the hotel messenger several minutes heavy pounding on the door of his room to rouse him, and once roused it took more long seconds for the information to penetrate his aching head that a message had been delivered for him.

Argyle crossed hurriedly to the door and wrenched it open. He snatched the envelope from the messenger's hand with indecent haste, and then slammed the door in the startled native's face.

One sheet of paper was all the envelope contained, but the instructions listed were clear and explicit.

'You will go to space-field number fifteen and take passage on a private cruiser which will be waiting for you. The number of the ship is R.A.473, and the departure time eight hundred tomorrow, there is a crew of two who know what to do thereafter. I need hardly point out that a visit to the Law Squads will almost surely prove fatal.'

There was no signature. None was needed.

At least, something had happened, and he felt that some portion of a large load had been lifted from his mind. Food was more acceptable under the lessening of tension, and he washed, freshened himself up, and went out for a meal in one of the more garish night clubs that were scattered through the entertainment sector of the city. It was after midnight when he got back to the hotel, happier under the influence of the food and the drink than he had been earlier. The desk clerk eyed him with surprise when he requested a call for six in the morning after ascertaining that space-field fifteen was half an hour's flight by aircab across the city.

He slept well, and after an early breakfast left the hotel just after seven. The aircab got him to the space-field at a quarter to eight and he learned from the operations control that cruiser R.A.473 was on the far side of the small field and scheduled for an eight o'clock take off. Apparently Dellora didn't think he would refuse the invitation. A small runabout whisked him across the field, and it was exactly five-to-eight when he stood at the bottom of the ramp and looked up at the open hatch of the small ship.

A man appeared in the hatch and looked down at him.

"Your name Argyle?"

"That's right."

"Come aboard. We didn't think you'd make it."

He stepped into the vessel, his heart cold within him. The basis of Dellora's plan was suddenly clear to him. You couldn't openly kidnap a man from a planet like Rigel Five; there was all sorts of reasons against it. Customs inspection, the Law Squads, a dozen other perfectly good reasons why Dellora wouldn't risk an actual physical kidnapping. The only sure way was to make the one you wanted leave the planet voluntarily and without arousing suspicion.

"Cabin's up front," the dark-eyed, plump-faced man informed him.

"I know ships," growled Argyle.

The other shrugged and followed him forward to the smaller passenger cabin. The second crewman was a slim, dark-skinned man of Terran origin, but with a colour that was caused by a different sun than that of Earth. He looked at Argyle curiously as he entered and then pointed wordlessly to an unoccupied passenger seat just to the rear of the pilot's chair. Argyle sank into it and strapped himself in for takeoff.

The poison had been injected into him forty-eight hours previously, and this vessel was not equipped for trips of more than a few days duration. Taking Ramchand's figure of seven to ten days for the poison to have its full effect, and also the probable range of the cruiser, Argyle thought that he would have a three- or four-day flight ahead of him. Actually it took just over two days, and then to his surprise the rendezvous was not with the larger interstellar craft that he'd anticipated.

He had cleared away the remains of the packaged meal and deposited all the waste in the incinerator, when the dark-skinned pilot called.

"Hey, you, Argyle. Take a look ahead."

Through the forward viewscreen he could see a bright pinpoint of light too large for a star. It grew bigger even as he looked at it, shining by the reflected light the Rigel sun gave, a tiny world, hardly bigger than an asteroid, almost certainly airless and deserted.

"What is it?" he asked, hardly expecting an answer.

The pilot laughed and shook his head. "You'll see as soon as we land."

The ship came in to land on a wide plain of smooth, dead rock that was clearly an artificial construction. It pointed to the fact that, at some time in the past the planet had been used for mining operations or some other commercial project. Now, it was deserted.

From a locker the tubby man took three spacesuits, two of which he handed to the pilot and to Argyle. There were no instructions and Argyle knew better than to argue; he was in no position to object. As he donned the suit a sudden wild plan flashed across his mind that he might manage to take control of the ship and blast off, leaving his two captors behind. During the whole trip their supervision of him had been sketchy to say the least.

He let the idea slide from him. There could be no profit in that, and the other two knew it as well as he did. He had to have an antidote to the injection within three days, and the only way to get it was to comply with the wishes of the opposition.

Together they left the vessel and Argyle followed the pilot across the wide, flat expanse of the field. Light from the parent star cast brilliantly accented shadows around them. It was Argyle's first experience of landing on a dead world, with the clearcut outlines of the surrounding hills making them seem as

if he could reach out and touch them with his hand. They walked steadily for several minutes and he could make out a dull gleam of light low down in the side of the hills at ground level. As they drew nearer the square outline of an airlock, with its single guiding light shining brightly, became clear.

The pilot operated the outer door of the lock and they stepped into a lighted inner chamber. The outer door swung to, and the inner opened silently. His two captors removed their helmets and Argyle followed suit. They stepped through the inner doors into a brilliantly lit corridor, and Argyle realised that his previous conjecture about mining operations had been correct. The tiny world had been stripped of all that was valuable in the way of mineral wealth, and had then been deserted—until Alfredo Dellora decided to make some use of it.

Even as the thought about Dellora crossed his mind they paused before a closed door. The pilot knocked, opened it, and pushed Argyle inside. The door closed behind him.

It was almost like being back in his room on the space station all those weeks before. The room was small and well furnished. There were tridiscopes on the walls, and every sign that it was carefully maintained for occupation at any time that it might be required.

"I find it very useful to have a hideaway like this, Argyle."

He turned and found the familiar, full-lipped figure of Alfredo Dellora standing looking at him from dark, liquid eyes.

"Sit down, sit down." Dellora waved to a comfortable armchair with all the agreeability of a host bent on being charming to a distinguished guest.

Argyle was in no mood to play games. His nerves, taut as bow strings for these last few days, were almost at their limits. He had taken just about as much as he could stand during the last few months, things which were so much apart from his normal life that he wondered how he had retained his sanity through it all.

"I didn't come here to play games, Dellora," he snapped. "Get to whatever you want and let's have done with it."

Dellora tutted gently. "You have caused me a great deal of trouble, Argyle," he remarked. "You should be more gentle—"

"Gentle be damned," roared Argyle. "I don't even know what's going on any more. Sure, you killed your father and

tried to pin the blame on me. But what harm do you think I can do you? I couldn't prove anything even if I wanted to. All I want to do is to be left alone."

The dark eyes gazed at him speculatively. "You know, I could almost believe you."

"Then why the devil don't you? And what's all this nonsense about filling me full of a selective drug?"

"Surely that was obvious. Kidnapping is extraordinarily out of date. I had to embark on some means which would guarantee your removal from Rigel Five."

"So I was right about that." Argyle relaxed slightly in his chair. "But why not have me taken back to Dellora planet? Or is that your ultimate intention?"

"Why should I want to do that?"

Argyle laughed grimly, "A rigged trial, a quick execution. I wouldn't need to trouble you any further—if that is your chief concern."

"Unfortunately that is no longer possible," replied Dellora. "Even in my own domain my powers are limited, I made a basic error trying to hush up the fact that my father had been murdered when I found out that you had escaped and vanished. I caused it to be given out that you were wanted for armed robbery—a charge which few people believed anyway. As a result you achieved some embarrassing publicity both on Dellora and elsewhere. I dare not risk bringing you into the limelight again. Therefore, I have been forced to resort to other means to accomplish your removal from the scene."

"Hell, man, I told you—"

"I do not believe you because I have evidence to the contrary," Dellora interrupted coldly. "For years my father has acted against the best interests of the company Dellora for reasons which you know all too well. That is a state of affairs which I intend to reverse, and the first step in that reversal is your removal from the scene. Preacher Judd will find his activities severely curtailed I think."

Argyle opened his mouth to add further vehement protests. He said nothing. Dellora was obviously speaking at him rather than to him. Self justification was his aim in talking. He was not trying to convince Argyle of anything. His dark eyes flashed with the strength of his conviction, and Argyle shuddered slightly as he realised that Dellora was a megalomaniac who pursued his self-appointed course irrespective of outside influences.

He asked, "What about the antidote for that damned injection?"

"Antidote?" Dellora brought himself back from some distant mental world. "Oh, yes. I'm afraid there isn't one, Argyle. I never had any made when the poison was bred from the cultures."

A cold hard knot of panic and despair settled in Argyle's being. He felt sick with terror and shock—and then he realised that, deep within himself, he had known this all along. His experience on Dellora had proved how badly Alfredo Dellora had wanted to get rid of him, and now the man had found the ideal way. It would have done no good to leave dead bodies lying around on Rigel Five for the Law Squads to find. This had been his solution. Get Argyle quietly away from Rigel Five and leave him to die somewhere far removed from the normal processes of the law.

Not that Alfredo Dellora had much to fear from the Law Squads unless his powers as a teleport were made public. If that happened then his carefully constructed alibis would be shattered. Whatever else he might be Alfredo Dellora was a meticulously careful person who left nothing to chance.

"What—do you intend?" he asked shakily.

"Nothing my dear fellow. I shall simply depart from this tiny world and abandon one of my private hideaways. It has served its purpose and I do not think anyone will be paying it a visit for several years. That will suit my needs admirably."

"But—but those two men who brought me here. They'll know I'm here."

Dellora laughed softly. "You don't credit me with much intelligence Argyle. They will leave without us, and, naturally they will assume that we have other means of leaving the planet. In fact, I shall take pains to assure them on that point." He laughed again at a private joke. "Of course, you realise that I have other means to leave. You are the one who will remain."

"Get the hell out of here, Dellora," he snapped. "You stink the place out."

A faint flush stained Dellora's face.

Abruptly, he was gone.

Argyle had seen kineticists at work on several occasions, principally on the stages of various theatres scattered through the Galaxy, but no demonstration he had ever seen compared with

the sheer unnerving fact that one instant Dellora stood before him in full, solid view—and the next he was gone.

Argyle could almost have sworn he felt the faint rush of wind as air flowed into the space so suddenly vacated by the teleport. It was long minutes before he realised that he was alone.

He sat down again, too shaken and distraught to do anything but try and gather strength to his stricken body. The realisation of his hopeless position made him feel physically sick and ill, and he retched slightly with emotional reaction, his head buried in his hands as he did so.

XI

There was a long period after Dellora left him when Argyle was not quite sane. No man can endure absolute isolation, especially when he knows that such isolation will end in his ultimate death either by a painful end from starvation or from the doubtful effects of an unknown poison. It was that lack of knowledge which affected Argyle's mind temporarily.

Later, reason returned and he sat on the edge of the arm-chair, shaken but capable of rational thought once more. There was always the quick way out. He did not doubt that if he looked for it he would find some way of accomplishing his own self-destruction without waiting for the crippling effects of poison to take him slowly and insanely away from life. He crossed to the door and found it unlocked. The corridor was still bright, and he turned away from the direction of the airlock to walk towards the centre of the hills into which the tunnel was burrowed. Other doors opened off to the left and right at intervals, and Argyle explored the rooms behind them with little interest and no hope.

There were several storage rooms, empty now, and a large, well-equipped kitchen. There were two power rooms and several well-furnished living rooms including a small tridi theatre, a large dining suite that could have seated upwards of twenty or thirty people.

The corridor ran for several hundred yards well lit and brightly decorated. Then, gradually, the lights became fewer and plainer, the carpeting gave way to coarse, plastic flooring and the walls assumed a dull, monotonous grey. He came at last to the point where the last light tube flickered in brilliant loneliness and the tunnel degenerated into an uneven, cavern

with chipped, moist walls, that ran away into the darkness before him.

At this point Dellora had stopped adapting the mine shaft for his own use. There was no point in going on and he turned back. The next direction to which he turned his thoughts was outwards beyond the airlock, and he went into the room where he had left the helmet to his space suit. Alfredo Dellora didn't miss much, he realised with a pang of distress. The helmet was gone.

There was no point in remaining dressed in the heavy suit, and Argyle stripped it off and left it lying in a crumpled heap on the floor. He wandered along to the kitchen and the store rooms to carry out a more extensive search, but his efforts yielded him little. There was water to be had in plenty, and a few cartons of various exotic foods left discarded in the corners of cold storage cupboards. It was clear that the main bulk of supplies had been recently removed. An examination of some of the food containers revealed unheard of delicacies which Argyle had sampled only a few times in his life.

Later, when hunger finally made itself felt on his weary body, he gorged himself with the delicacies on hand, and went to sleep with a mind more clear and rested than he would have believed possible a few hours earlier. Sleep came to him quickly and was not disturbed by dreams as it had been so often of late.

Argyle slept without waking for nine hours which proved just how much had been taken out of him by the violence of his emotions. His feelings, when he awoke, were curiously composed ; he was able to analyse his position with a clarity of vision that he found almost frightening—and at the end of it he came to an inescapable conclusion with a cold rationality that he hardly believed possible.

There was no way out.

From sheer force of habit he performed his waking toilet and then made a luxurious breakfast from the remains of the cartons he had opened the night before.

It was six days since the poison injection had been made.

From sheer boredom he made another tour of his surroundings, taking more meticulous note of the layout and design of the mine shaft which Dellora had adapted so ingeniously. His four-hour examination yielded little that he did not already know, and the lack of a hand torch of some sort

or other prevented him from penetrating into the dark recesses of the mine beyond the point where Dellora's civilising influence ceased.

He made his way back to the kitchens, aware that his stomach was beginning to protest. Exotic luxury in food was all right, he decided, but the ache was there for more bulky foods which a Terran needed to balance his staple diet.

The whine of distant machinery startled him from his meal, and all thoughts of hunger vanished as he sat taut and still, his ears striving to identify the distant sound. He left the kitchen at a run and paused in the corridor only long enough to confirm that the noise he had heard was still there and that it came from the direction of the airlock.

The outer door was opening.

He sprinted along the corridor, a wild, unreasoning hope flaring within him. The whining stopped as he reached a bend in the corridor, and then it began again this time louder and more marked. As he rounded the corner he saw the inner door of the lock swing slowly open.

The three or four seconds which passed as he stood, frozen to the spot, waiting for the person to enter who had operated the lock, seemed like hours.

A voice said, "There's light inside anyway," and the sound of it boomed at him from the chamber of the lock.

The gap widened into an entrance and the figures of three space-suited men, each carrying a helmet, walked forward into the brighter lights of the corridor.

The second of them was Lawman Sworder.

He grinned at Argyle. "You get yourself into the darndest places, Argyle," he commented.

"Sworder. But—I—"

Argyle floundered and was lost. A wave of emotion swept over him brought on by the realisation that he wasn't alone any more.

They gripped hands and Argyle choked incontinently as he tried to say some nonchalant words of welcome. He didn't feel very nonchalant.

"Well, you look all right to me," said Sworder.

Argyle managed a smile. "You're in at the death anyway."

"Oh, yes." Sworder's face lost its smile. "The poison."

Argyle gaped at him in surprise. "How—?"

"How did we know? You're not very bright. You don't think a man like Ramchand would keep quiet when he knew that there was a selective poison loose on Rigel Five."

"He reported it?"

"Of course he did. We had a watch on you right from the moment he called us. We followed you to the space field and we tracked that ship you boarded on the radarscope until we knew just where it was headed."

"As a matter of interest," put in Argyle, "where was it headed?"

"Rigel Three," Sworder told him. "Anyway, let's get back to this drug you got stuffed full of." He indicated to the short, plump man beside him, "This is Doctor Berov. I brought him along—"

"To sign the death certificate," finished Argyle grimly.

Berov laughed, "Maybe. Maybe not. You don't credit us with much intelligence, Argyle. That's the trouble with so many people, they're so ignorant. They know a few facts and they get worried. The Law Squad labs haven't been idle these last few years."

"You mean you can cure a selective poison?" asked Argyle incredulously, "But Ramchand said—"

"Ramchand is a fool," Sworder told him bluntly. "You had to choose probably the worst and most obsolete analytical chemist on Rigel Five."

A sudden burst of hope welled through Argyle. The Universe was a wonderful place—even with Alfredo Dellora.

"We've been able to cure selective poison shots for the past three years," said Berov. "We don't advertise the fact for the very good reason that what the criminal doesn't know may very well help to trap him—and it works, believe me."

"Let's get you back to the ship," said Sworder. "The sooner the better, eh?"

"I haven't got a spacesuit," said Argyle.

"Oh, we'll soon fix that."

Fifteen minutes later Argyle stepped through the airlock of the Law Squad ship and stripped off his spacesuit. Berov took him straight along to the sick bay and began the blood tests and separation work necessary before he could begin preparation of the antidote. He worked steadily for a quarter of an hour while Argyle sat and talked to Sworder. Sworder elaborated on the means by which they had checked on him after Ram-

chand had reported to them, and Argyle in turn gave the lawman details of his removal from Rigel Five and the means which Alfredo Dellora had employed to accomplish his end.

"Why the hell he didn't just shoot me and have done with it," he ended, "I don't know."

Sworder nodded. "The criminal mind is never logical, Argyle," he said. "It's obvious that Dellora is a megalomaniac—he probably has dreams of power which would send any good psychiatrist into ecstasies—and a man like him has to have concrete proof of his right to power. Merely shooting a defenceless man isn't sufficient. It had to be an artistic end in which he could take pride—"

Sworder broke off as Berov crossed from his work bench. The doctor had a thoughtful frown, and his pursed lips showed his puzzlement.

"Something wrong?" asked Argyle, his heart beating suddenly more quickly.

"Eh? Oh, no. Nothing wrong. You don't need to be cured that's all."

"What?"

Berov nodded. "The poison is no longer active in your body. There are traces that you were certainly injected with it, but I can only assume that Dellora made some error when he was concocting his hell's brew that rendered it harmless."

"Dellora's too careful to make mistakes like that," Argyle shook his head. "I can't see—"

"The poison is dead, it can't hurt you, it never could, that's all you need to know," insisted Berov.

Sworder gripped his shoulder and shook him gently. "Berov's right. You were lucky. Don't question it too far, Argyle. One day it might run out on you."

Argyle laughed grimly. "It ran out on me that day back on Jones when Spiros caught up with me."

"Or when your wife left you." Sworder looked at him soberly.

Argyle lifted his head in surprise, and then the unspoken comment before the words hit him. He nodded. "I get it. It probably ran out on me the day I was born."

"It happens to us all," laughed Berov.

"And now what?" asked Sworder.

"I don't know. I haven't got used to being alive again yet."

"Thought about what I said to you before?"

Argyle raised his eyebrows in an unspoken question.

"I warned you that Dellora wouldn't leave you alone, no matter what guarantee you might give that you just wanted to live your own quiet life. You can't do that when you're dealing with a person like Dellora." Sworder shook his head. "It won't work, Argyle. You may not know what you're mixed up in, but Dellora does, and that's why he's afraid of you. Sure, you don't know as much as he thinks you do, but that won't alter one little thing. Whatever he's playing for the stakes are big—big enough to involve a man like Armadeus Judd. You can't fight by running away or turning the other cheek. Next time Dellora sets his sights on you—"

"He might be lucky." Argyle rested his forehead on his right hand and leaned his elbow on his knee. "Yes, I know, Sworder, but what can I do?"

"Go to Earth and see Judd."

"Me? A broken down, third-rate space engineer? I can just see the reception I'd get."

"There are ways. You'll find one."

Argyle didn't feel the ship take off. He dimly recalled Sworder leaving the sick bay and Berov following him. Then the lights faded and his mind sank into the peaceful depths of unconsciousness for which it cried. When he awoke, hours later, they were deep in space with Rigel Three behind them, and the red disc of the Rigel sun burning brightly abeam.

He lay quiet and felt the faint throb of the ship around him, a quiet, somnolent insistence that was restful and reassuring. Thought came to him more easily and more logically; in the clear light of a rested and refreshed mind he could see the sense of all that Sworder had said. It was brought home to him now even more forcibly than before. Once away from Dellora planet and its new master he had thought that an episode was ended. He had been wrong. An episode had only begun, was still only beginning, and he was at the centre of whatever web was being woven across the Galaxy by one Alfredo Dellora.

Sworder never mentioned the matter to him further during the trip back to Rigel Five. They ate together in the Officer's mess and played cards, they talked of anything and everything—except Dellora. The trip was in the nature of a rest cure for Argyle. He had nothing to worry about—in the immediate future; he was in the company of a man he liked and respected, and he found a new friend in the plump figure of Doctor

Gregory Berov. He was in a much happier frame of mind when at last they landed on spacefield nine.

He said goodbye to Berov, and Sworder took him across the vast expanse of the city to his hotel.

They chatted idly in the aircab for some long minutes and then Sworder asked quietly, "Decided what you're going to do yet?"

Argyle looked away from him out of the bay window. He was back in reality, brought there by seven quiet words. And reality had to be faced, he knew that. He had been postponing the fateful moment of truth until the last possible second and now—that second was with him.

Under the brilliant light of the Rigel sun the city spread below him, bright and shining and busy with the commerce of the Galaxy. It was a hub on which a vast wheel turned slowly with Earth as the axle, and the wheel was the wheel of the Universe.

"I'm going to Earth," he replied slowly, "to try and see Preacher Judd."

XII

The brilliant globe of Earth hung large against the black backdrop of the heavens. Its green immensity dwarfed the stars and made them shrink to insignificance. To the eyes of any man it had a beauty which no other star or planet could ever have, because the eyes of man were tuned to it as no other heavenly body could ever be. It was home.

The two month trip was almost ended, and as Argyle gazed out of the tiny viewport of his cabin he felt a sudden hunger to be down there with damp grass of an early morning in spring soft under his feet. Six years was too long for anyone to stay away, and now he was back.

He had been lucky in getting away from Rigel Five. His first enquiry at the main travel centre had brought doubt to his mind. The journey to Earth as a private passenger would have just about cleaned his bank account dry. Freight rates had risen sharply during the past weeks as the Traders had jacked up their prices. The independents, finding themselves suddenly overburdened with work had followed suit to cash in on the sudden boom, and the overall increase of passenger rates amounted to almost fifty percent. The scream that went

up could be heard clear across the Galaxy—but nothing could be done.

Strong in the minds of everyone was the last occasion on which a civil planetary administration had tried to curb the power of the Traders. Earth had suffered long and hard for her folly on that occasion, and the fact had been driven home solidly that those who ruled the star lanes controlled the Galaxy.

Sworder had helped him immeasurably when he knew the difficulty with which Argyle was faced. Inside two weeks there was a well-paid berth as second engineer on an independent passenger freighter lined up and Argyle arrived on Earth with more money than he had when he left Rigel Five. He wasn't a millionaire by any means, but at least the immediate necessity of accumulating further funds was pushed into the background for a few weeks.

They came into land on the broad concrete plain to the west of the Great Rift Valley in central Africa that was Earth's biggest space-field. Argyle wasted no time in getting paid off; he checked through the customs and the space crew control office, and took an aircab south and to the east of the great spired city of Nairobi. His most immediate need was a headquarters where he could rest and plan what action he might take to get in personal touch with the Chief Minister, Armadeus Judd.

Here again Sworder had been helpful. For what it might be worth he had given Argyle a letter of introduction to one of his former colleagues in the Terran Law Squads, a man named Arnold Matheson, who was now a Chief Controller, responsible for all the Security arrangements over a wide area of Western Europe. Most important was the fact that his area of responsibility bordered closely on another region, that of Southern Europe and North Africa, a region which included the city of Athens, headquarters of the World Council, and home of the President and Chief Minister—Armadeus Judd.

He chose for his immediate residence the towering bulk of the Stanley Hotel, a forty-storied building on the wide esplanade of Dellamere Avenue. It was luxurious and old established, and he was glad that there were Terrans in charge of his needs once more. It was the rule rather than the exception that, on other planets, aliens of various races—generally those native to the planet in the question—were employed in the more menial tasks. Terrans had an antipathy to leaving

their own world simply to be employed as messengers and clerks and cooks and bottle washers.

Argyle spent a day or so getting his bearings and picking up the threads of life of his home world. After seven years there had been changes such as he would not have thought possible. The crowded airways had called for new techniques in transport, and the first of two giant inter-continental tunnels had been carved across the world from Europe to the Americas. It had been open a year. The great bulk of goods and passengers was carried in long tubular trains at upwards of eight hundred miles an hour, and at depths up to five thousand feet beneath the surface of the Earth. The second from the American continent to Asia was well under way.

The political situation, in which he had never taken much interest, caught his attention now because of his interest in Preacher Judd. He soon found that Judd was the hero who could do no wrong—indeed, everything he did seemed to be right. The rolling oratory of his speeches recalled the recordings of great men of the past. The sincerity of a Roosevelt mingled with the Churchillian resonance, and the fire of an Espinoza was tempered with the gentleness of a Rajnik.

These phrases Argyle read in an appreciation of Armadeus Judd written for his fifty-eighth birthday, but he agreed with the anonymous writer after he had seen Judd in action on the videoscreen one night soon after his arrival. The speech itself was unimportant. Argyle realised later that it had something to do with the negotiations between Earth and the Traders on the subject of freight and passenger rates across the Galaxy. The Terran government, it seemed, was seriously disturbed by the recent turn of events, and Judd gave an outline of his plans and ideas to cope with the situation.

It was the man himself who held Argyle's attention.

He was a giant in stature, all of six and half feet tall, with a broad, heavy frame that was inclined to plumpness. His face was lined prematurely and heavily jowelled, and deep eyes set in dark sockets looked out on the world with an honesty that illuminated the soul behind the physical facade. His hair was pure white save at the temples where flecks of black showed over the ears. His voice was deep and resonant, theatrical at first, until one realised that the man wasn't acting; every word he spoke had the ring of utter sincerity and no shade of meaning was ever unclear to the listener. He spoke for ten minutes, calmly and without fuss; oratorical showmanship was missing

completely, but Argyle felt it to be there, just beneath the surface, the whole time.

The broadcast ended, and Argyle sat back in his chair deeply impressed. So this was Armadeus Judd. At least he would recognise him if ever they met.

He stayed in the hotel for several days, making enquiries and checking every possible detail before moving on. His immediate objective was London and the office of Arnold Matheson. He was tempted at first to go to Athens and try to see Judd on his own initiative, but his slight knowledge of official protocol, even in that enlightened day, made him think again and decide against it. Matheson was his best hope.

He checked out of the Stanley Hotel, and took passage on a jet liner bound for the north. In three hours he was in London, and another hotel was added to his collection.

He checked in at a small establishment on the outskirts of the City centre, but within easy reach of Matheson's headquarters. He realised that he might have several weeks of delay even if he managed to see Matheson quickly, and he almost regretted his splash in Nairobi which had bitten more deeply into his financial resources than he now considered necessary. It was more than nine years since he had last been in London, and that had been for a fleeting visit only. He had found it more convenient to live in Johannesburg, and during the short period of their married life Angela and he had not found the need to wander far from their penthouse apartment in the South African city.

Like all old European cities London was an odd mixture of the very old and very new. The central part, around the river Thames, had been maintained in all its historic splendour for well over a thousand years, but to the north and south the small ancient buildings of Westminster and the City were dwarfed by giant pinnacles and gleaming towers that held the new London in all its teeming splendour. The old district names had been retained, but the districts themselves had long since vanished into the mists of antiquity.

Matheson had his office high in the Law Squad skyscraper in an area known as the Barbican. Argyle found that out during his first day. His next object was to make sure that his letter of introduction reached Matheson personally, and that might take time. The thought of risking it to the internal postal system did not appeal to him. Stars alone knew how many

private secretaries and other officials it might have to go to before reaching Matheson himself. The next best thing was to send it to his private address—or better still, to deliver it himself. Even if Matheson was not at home there was a better chance of him receiving personal mail there than at his office.

The next morning he got Matheson's address from a local directory and after lunch set out across the city to a residential suburb in the north where the Law Squad controller had his dwelling. The garden suburb of Tring, with its giant blocks of flats was a bare twenty minutes by air cab across the city, and finding Matheson's apartment took him little time.

He did not expect to find the man at home at this time of the day, but at least the initial ice would be broken. The man-servant who answered the door had Law Squad written all over him, and, for the first time, Argyle realised that such a person as Matheson was unlikely to live in unguarded loneliness.

"I have a personal letter for Mister Matheson," he stated as deferentially as he could.

The man eyed him up and down, and Argyle knew that every detail of his dress, appearance and physical description were being noted for future reference.

"He isn't here."

"Well, I didn't expect he would be." Argyle took out a stylopen and wrote his address on the back of the envelope. "Will you please see that he gets this when he returns, and then perhaps he would be kind enough to get in touch with me at this hotel where I shall be staying for a week or so."

The man nodded, took the envelope, and closed the door. Just as quickly as that, thought Argyle. There was an anticlimax to the whole proceedings. Probably he would never see the letter again or hear from Matheson. He turned away and took the elevator down to the ground floor. In half an hour he was back in his hotel still wondering whether he had taken the right course.

He spent the evening in the hotel because he thought that Matheson might call him if he received the letter when he got home. It was a faint hope that didn't come off and he went to bed late with a sense of failure that he could not quite justify.

He spent the rest of the next morning in the hotel growing more anxious by the hour, and cursing himself for a fool in not demanding to see Matheson personally. It might have had

unfortunate results, but at least he would have forced himself into the attention of the man.

After lunch he went up to his room and found Alfredo Dellora waiting for him.

Argyle's heart turned over as he closed the door behind him and saw the familiar figure of Alfredo step from the toilet room with a needle gun in his gloved hand. There was no smile on the petulant face ; the eyes were hooded and vicious as if their owner had long since lost patience with a very difficult puzzle.

"Surprised, Argyle?" were his first words. "I must admit it took me a little time to find you."

"Why did you bother?" asked Argyle dully as he sat down on the edge of the bed.

"You are becoming something more than just an inconvenient nuisance," snapped Dellora. "You seem to have the luck of the devil himself."

"Or else you're becoming careless. Ever thought about that?"

"I am governed by circumstances like everyone else. All I can do is try to take advantage of them." Dellora seated himself across the room in the lone easy chair with the needle gun pointed steadily at Argyle.

After a few moments silence Argyle asked, "Well, what happens next?"

"We are waiting for a caller. I do not think he will be very long."

"A caller ! Who?"

Dellora shrugged. "I suppose you might as well know. His name is Sigmund Grant and he is by trade a dealer in precious stones."

"What?"

The visiphone on the table buzzed lightly and Dellora moved quickly to pick it up. He didn't switch on the vision.

"Yes?" he said softly.

"A gentleman named Grant to see Mister Argyle."

"Send him up," Dellora told the man at the other end.

"And connect me with an outside line, please."

Argyle sat frozen and unmoving under the threat of the needle gun. He was too stunned to have made any effort, however suicidal, to get out of the latest threat with which he was confronted. Dellora got his outside line and dialled a number which Argyle could not see because he carefully shielded the dial with his body as he did so.

A muffled voice said, "Hallo."

"Now," said Dellora softly, and broke the connection. Then he sat down again.

"What the hell is all this," demanded Argyle. There was fear in his heart and he wondered hopelessly what new horror Dellora was cooking up for him. And over all was the dull insistent question. Why didn't Dellora just shoot him if he wanted him out of the way so badly? Was he afraid of the efficiency of the Law Squads? Perhaps even a man as powerful as Dellora had some respect for the forces of the law.

There was a knock at the door to interrupt Argyle's reverie, and Dellora opened it with the gun out of sight.

"Mister Argyle?" asked the knocker.

"Please come in," replied Dellora courteously.

Argyle watched with limp horror as a plump round-faced man dressed in expensive clothes came into the room, smiling roundly.

"That is Mister Argyle," said Dellora, still keeping the gun out of sight of the visitor.

"Glad to meet you, Mister Argyle. My name is Sigmund Grant."

Argyle nodded wordlessly and wondered if his mind was going as the pantomime that Dellora had arranged was played out before him.

"I think if I were you, Argyle," remarked Dellora, "I should tell Mister Grant what I have in my hand."

"Eh?" Grant looked at Argyle in surprise.

"He is pointing a needle gun at both of us, Mister Grant," said Argyle dully.

Grant gaped at him in utter bewilderment, the smile sliding from his round face to be replaced by an expression of sheer disbelief. Then the obvious explanation presented itself to his mind, and a look of grim satisfaction spread over him.

"My jewel case has a personal lock, gentlemen. If this is an attempt at robbery I can only assume that you are the most careless pair of thieves in all creation. In fact, I might as well tell you that I have activated my personal alarm which is connected with the local headquarters of the Law Squad. I imagine you have about two minutes of freedom left to you."

"Rather less than that, Mister Grant," remarked Dellora.

Outside in the corridor there came the sound of running feet.

"I'm glad you activated your alarm," continued Dellora calmly. "I rather hoped you would add some confirmation to my own efforts."

The footsteps reached the locked door and Dellora lifted the gun.

"Goodbye, gentlemen," he said, and shot Grant carefully and deliberately in the left eye.

Argyle watched with horrified fascination as the body of the man slid slowly to the floor from the table against which it had been slumped. He seemed incapable of movement, frozen by the new terror that Dellora had unleashed from his warped mind. And still the significance didn't hit him.

"Catch Argyle," called Dellora softly, and Argyle reached out automatically to catch the slim gleaming object which Dellora tossed at him.

Abruptly, Dellora vanished, and in the next second the door burst open.

The Law Squad trio found the newly dead body of Sigmund Grant and also the frozen figure of Richard Argyle, the murder weapon clasped tight in his right hand.

XIII

Argyle reached the presence of Arnold Matheson more quickly and easily than he ever anticipated. The journey was one he didn't remember much about. He was bundled from the hotel, still stupified by the shock of events, by the calm brutality of the murder he had just witnessed.

If he had ever doubted the cunning ruthlessness of Alfredo Dellora before, this latest outrage removed any shadow that remained. Swarder had been right. Wherever he went, and whatever he did, Dellora would hound him until he presented no further threat to whatever ambitions he was obstructing.

He sat in the Law Squad aircar that whisked him across the city, with a silently efficient guard on either side of him. They said little to each other and nothing to him. Argyle, for his part, was too shocked and terrified to frame any sensible comment.

The car landed on the flat copter roof of the Law Squad building, and Argyle sat frozen and uncaring in his seat until one of the guards tapped him on the shoulder.

"Out," he said tersely.

He stumbled and almost fell as he went through the hatch and down the short ladder. His legs were weak under him, and he felt physically sick with reaction. The guards took him to a reception office on a lower floor, and there he went, semi-

consciously, through the degradation of fingerprinting, retina patterns, identity checks, and all the other official impedimenta of routine connected with the arrest of a criminal.

Dimly, he realised that he was being charged with murder, but the fact hardly registered on his distraught mind, and at last he was alone in a small but comfortable cell with only his own thoughts and fears for company. The edge of the bunk was hard under him as he slumped on to it and buried his face in his hands. His shoulders shook and his body trembled as the intensity of suppressed emotions was allowed to unfold.

Gradually his nerves quietened and his senses regained some of their normal stability. The ability to think more clearly returned as he realised that fear was something he had lived with for many months now ; the thought robbed his mind of some of its terror. This was another phase in the game that he was caught up in, and each phase had, in turn, brought with it its own answers. It was the unknown that frightened him ; the uncertainty of what was going to happen in the future rather than the knowledge of what had happened in the past. The old questions, which were by now so familiar, revolved in his mind in kaleidoscopic fashion. Why did Dellora fear him ? Why the elaborate plots to get rid of him ? Surely Dellora wasn't so afraid of the Law Squads that he dare not kill Argyle outright ? A man with nerve enough to set up the murder of a harmless old man like Sigmund Grant, would surely not stop at murdering Argyle ? And yet he had—not once, but twice ; and each occasion had followed one actual attempt on his life back on the metal world of Pietro Dellora.

There was neither sense nor reason in the incongruity of the situation. He did not believe Sworder's explanation that Dellora was a megalomaniac who needed elaborate extravaganzas to satisfy his ego. Such an idea was too glib, too neat—and it didn't fit the facts.

In some way that Argyle didn't even begin to understand, he was the central figure in a Galaxy-wide puzzle, the key to which was always just out of reach, just around the next corner, just beyond the next trap.

Coldly, he realised that Sworder wasn't around to help him this time.

The cell door rattled slightly and opened. Two Lawmen stood in the corridor outside and he rose in answer to an unspoken summons.

"Where now ?"

"More questions, I guess," said the taller of the two. "I wouldn't know. We're just messenger boys."

They took him in a lift up and up the towering bulk of the building, and figure 59 glowed on the control panel before the lift slid to a halt. They got out. A long, curving corridor ran away to the left and right ; they turned left and followed it, the soft plastic flooring making no sound as they walked. A door marked ' Private ' didn't stop them entering without knocking, and a man at a desk in the small office eyed them questioningly as they entered.

"Argyle," said the tall guard briefly.

The man at the desk nodded and flicked a switch on the intercom unit beside his desk.

"Argyle is here, sir."

"Send him in."

The guards ushered him through the door to the inner office, which was bright and light and high after the cramped gloom of the cell. It was an ascetic room, but tastefully furnished with book shelves lining the walls, and comfortable contemporary furniture which blended well with the books and the dark wooden panelling. Before the single large window was set a huge antique desk scattered with neat, irregular piles of papers, two visiphones and an intercom unit.

The man who sat behind it was dwarfed by its bulk, but he was not a man to be ignored. He was slim and dark, with smooth black hair and a thin, taut face ; the lips were firm and the eyes blue and piercing. He might have gone unnoticed in a crowd if it were not for the stubborn set of the mouth and the firm, uncompromising jaw line.

"Argyle, sir," said the tall guard.

The man studied him for a few seconds and waved briefly to a chair before the desk.

"Please, sit down." He nodded to the guards. "I'll call you."

Argyle's eyes flickered round the room and concentrated attention on the desk seeking some clue to the identity of the occupant. The man chuckled drily.

"Nine people out of ten who come into this room as strangers do just what you are doing," he remarked. "It's an interesting psychological point. One day I promise myself I'll do some research into it to see what it means."

His voice was calm and chatty, and Argyle relaxed unconsciously, his face slipping into a slight smile.

"Incidentally, I believe you wanted to see me," the man went on. "My name is Arnold Matheson."

Argyle sat up straight with surprise.

"You—then you got the letter I left at your apartment?"

Matheson nodded. "I must confess, Mister Argyle, that I had no intention of seeing you for some days until this business was brought to my notice. The connection seemed more than obvious. The murder accomplished what the letter would not—at least, for a while."

Argyle sat quiet. There was little he could say that would not seem stupid under the circumstances.

"I may say that I value my friendship with Sworder most highly," said Matheson, "which is why I have asked you here rather than leave this matter to the subordinates who would normally deal with it." He smiled. "As a matter of interest, Argyle, you've rather spoiled my record. I've been in charge of this region for almost three years, and this is the first murder that has occurred."

"I didn't spoil it," snapped Argyle. "But I know who did."

"I suppose Sworder has some reason for sending me that letter of introduction. He rated you most highly."

"That's nice of him."

"Which is why I am going to assume that this—ah—incident has something to do with the fact that you want to see Arma-deus Judd."

Argyle nodded.

"Suppose you tell me about it," said Matheson.

Argyle blinked in surprise. "All of it? From the beginning?"

Matheson studied the desk top before him. "There's one thing you learn if you're a Law Man, Argyle. Everything is part of a picture, and you can't get the true and proper perspective on anything that happens unless you know the whole story right down to the last detail. One fact is no good without all the others, because when it is placed in its true relationship to all the others it turns out, very often, not to be fact at all." He looked up and smiled disarmingly. "Yes, I think right from the beginning."

Argyle relaxed and tried to marshall his thoughts. Where did you begin a story like this? Did you start at the time you first met Sworder? Or that day on Jones when Spiros came into your life? Or must you go further back and talk about Angela and how you loved her, how she left you, and how you spent over seven years of your life roaming the

Galaxy seeking for the answer to God-knows-what mental pain?

He began to talk slowly and disjointedly, going back over his tracks to bring out details which he had missed, and slowly, the story came. He settled down into the swing of it and it seemed to flow from him as if it was a visifilm that unfurled its contents in accordance with the laws of time and motion.

Matheson didn't interrupt as the story unfolded. He sat in his chair behind the giant monstrosity of a desk and listened with hardly a muscle movement to show that he was not a statue.

Argyle told of the murder of Sigmund Grant and stopped talking. His story was ended, up to date, the finish still to be written, but he had told all he knew.

He shrugged and eased his body from its tense position in the chair.

"I wish I could tell you more, but I can't. I don't know the answers any more than Sworder does. All I know is that, somehow Preacher Judd is in it and I'm in it. Until I see Judd and talk with him I don't know what it's all about."

"He may not tell you," remarked Matheson.

"But still, I have to ask him—if I can."

"This murder, then? Your defence is that you were framed by a teleport?"

Argyle's eyes snapped angrily at Matheson as the line that was being taken registered on his mind.

"No, it isn't a defence as you call it. It's cold, hard fact, whether you believe it or not."

"I haven't said I didn't believe it."

"No, but—"

"Look, Argyle. You aren't thinking very clearly. I can't blame you under the circumstances. I arrived home from a trip to the continent to find a letter waiting for me from an old friend. It intrigued me because of the tone in which it was written and because of the unusual request which it contained." Matheson smiled. "Anyone who wants to see Armadeus Judd is unusual. The next thing I know is that a murder has been committed—and the murderer is no less a person than the subject of that letter. Now, if you were me, what would you do?"

Argyle floundered hopelessly, quite puzzled by the sudden twists of which Matheson seemed to be capable. One moment

he seemed to think of nothing but the conviction of a murderer, the next—!

“I don’t know. What?” he asked.

“I would get in touch with my friend and find out more about the supposed murderer. Wouldn’t I?”

Argyle felt a burst of hope surge through him. Matheson wasn’t fooling this time, of that he was sure.

“You’ve been in touch with Sworder?”

Matheson nodded. “I had a teepee hookup with him about half an hour ago. I got the whole story from him—almost word for word as you have told me.”

“And?”

“I believe it. Sworder isn’t a fool. I’ve known him too long and too closely. If he says there is a teleport loose in the Galaxy then I believe what he says, and I believe you.”

Argyle felt a wave of relief sweep over him. His fears of an hour before seemed entirely groundless now. Of course, he should have known that Matheson would contact Sworder, it was the only logical thing for him to do. He thanked the luck that had made him deliver the letter in person to Matheson’s residence. He hated to think what complication might have arisen otherwise.

“Does that mean you’ll wash out this murder charge?”

“No.”

“But—”

“I don’t think it wise,” continued Matheson calmly. “We’ll let it stay on the books with the comment that it is being investigated. We can stall that way for several weeks—then, quietly, we’ll drop it for lack of sufficient evidence.”

“What about the press and the video people?”

“They do more or less what we tell them—don’t quote me on that, it would never do. It’ll give you time to move around and see Judd. We might lull the opposition into a sense of security if they think you are out of their hair.”

Argyle nodded. He could see the sense behind the idea, but something in Matheson’s tone opened another avenue of questions in his mind.

“You said ‘They’ when you spoke about the opposition, Matheson,” he said. “What do you mean, ‘They’? As far as I’m concerned there is only one person—Alfredo Dellora.”

Matheson looked at him grimly, his blue eyes hard and his lips a taut line. “I don’t want to be rude, Argyle,” he com-

mented gently, "but you haven't really the right outlook for this sort of thing. Things are going on around you all the time and you see them, you read about them, you are part of them. But you don't know it. There is a simple two and two which you can put together quite easily if you think about it. It's now almost six months since Pietro Dellora died and his son Alfredo took over from him. What has happened in those six months?"

"How the devil should I know?"

"Did you happen to hear Judd's speech on the video the other night?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I did."

"Do you remember what it was about?"

Argyle frowned, casting his memory back to the speech he'd watched barely a week earlier. Mostly, he had watched it to see Preacher Judd, but as he thought about it he remembered that it had something to do with the traders and increased freight and passenger rates. He mentioned as much as he could recall and cocked a questioning eye at Matheson.

"That's right, more or less. Judd didn't give you the full picture because of arousing public panic. I told you I've just come back from the continent—"

"You mean you've been with Judd." For once Argyle was ahead of him.

"That's right. Before the death of Pietro Dellora there was a kind of status quo in the Galaxy. Enough trade for all the ships and all the companies. Alfredo Dellora takes over and suddenly, no more status quo. I don't know what it all means, but Judd does and he's worried. The Traders are building up to something and I have only a faint inkling what it is, Argyle. For centuries they've been the real power in the Galaxy, but they have been content with what they had because it was more than any one man or any group of men could handle. There was power—more power than any individual government had ever had. There was wealth—more than could be spent in a lifetime of spending. The whole Trader empire has grown up on soundly-based rules and policies, and then, suddenly, and for no apparent reason, they start trying to strangle the goose that lays the golden egg." He shrugged and looked grimly at Argyle. "I don't know why and neither do you, but I think Judd does, and I think you ought to see him. In fact, I'll make sure you do see him."

Argyle felt the tide rising up around him once more. It seemed that no sooner had one wave passed and beaten itself to

death on the shore, than another, larger and more terrifying than all the rest, pounded up to smash him.

"Why do you think I should see him?" he asked. "You've only known about me for a hour or two."

"Because you are important in some way to Alfredo Dellora. Therefore you must be equally important to Armadeus Judd. Perhaps he will be able to tell you why."

XIV

It was by now early evening, and over five hours had passed since Argyle had gone, unsuspecting to his hotel room to find Alfredo Dellora waiting for him. It seemed like five years.

Matheson proposed taking him home for the night, rather than leaving him to the dubious comfort of the cell to which he had been allocated.

"I don't want you to go back to the hotel at all," he told Argyle. "I'll have your things removed by one of my men. You can stay with me tonight, and tomorrow I'll make arrangements for you to see Judd. In the meantime, the quieter you're kept the better. I doubt if Alfredo will get any news about you if we're careful."

"Heaven forbid," replied Argyle with feeling.

"I can imagine how you feel. Having a teleport on your back is no fun." Matheson shook his head. "This is new and it's big. Judd will want to know about it in detail. We shall have to find out if there are any more teleports in the Galaxy, and that might prove difficult."

"One is enough for me."

"New things mean new techniques," Matheson told him. "When a thing is new people only see fear in it, and they have to be taught not to fear, and that can be difficult. There's another side of it, too. We have to find out how we can best make use of people with teleport talents. It might take time. With teepees it took years to kill public fear, and more years to fit them into their proper place in the scheme of things. Now," he shrugged, "it's a crime to commit a crime against a teepee because on them rests the speed and security of interstellar communications. But it took a long time. If you read your history you'll know how many telepaths were hunted down and murdered before we got the public educated to them."

He got up from behind the desk and stretched his lean, wiry body.

"Well, I expect you've had enough excitement for one day. There isn't any reason why we shouldn't head for home and a meal and a good night's sleep. Tomorrow may be a big day." "Are you sure this is all right?" asked Argyle, "Your wife—" "—is holidaying in Melbourne with the children," Matheson grinned. "And my home is more comfortable than that cell."

A Law Squad aircar took them swiftly out to Matheson's home, and the same man opened the door who took the letter from Argyle when he had called previously. He eyed Argyle carefully but without apparent interest.

They ate a meal served neatly and cooked well, and sat chatting for an hour. It was only a little after ten when Matheson showed Argyle to his room and bade him good-night. He lay awake in the darkness for some while; his body felt tired and yet he could not sleep. There was too much in his mind, too much to think about, too many questions to be answered, too much speculation. His earlier talk with Matheson had opened up vistas which he hadn't even imagined existed. He had been in the centre of all that had been happening, and yet he hadn't seen what it all added up to.

Matheson had pointed the way that things were moving; the Traders stepping up their rates was a minor thing itself, but when a man of the importance of Armadeus Judd got to be interested then there was more at the back of it than mere commercial exploitation. He knew vaguely of the previous occasion, almost two hundred years before when the strength of one company, the Company Dellora, had pitted itself against the entire might of Earth—and had won. Little was made of it in the history books he had read at school, because it was an episode that few people wanted to remember, but it had happened. Earth had lost, and the ancestor of Alfredo Dellora had won.

Was this another unseen war with economy instead of guns? With money instead of bombs? There seemed to be forces abroad in the Galaxy whose power was greater and more terrifying than any mere fleet whose weapons could be seen and could be appraised.

Argyle slept at last, but not peacefully.

He was awakened in the morning by the stony faced servant who told him that Matheson was already up and wanted to see him in the lounge as soon as he could manage it.

Argyle got up and washed and showered. He wondered why Matheson should bother to try and hurry him up—for that was what the message meant in effect. His slight beard vanished under the depilatory and he dressed quickly.

Matheson was seated in the lounge talking to someone on the visiphone and he merely nodded and waved Argyle to a seat. Something in his face and manner sent a coldness rippling through Argyle's body. The relaxed composure of the night before was gone and its place was the cold efficiency he had met with first in the office high in the Law Squad building.

Matheson broke the connection and leaned forward in his chair.

"We're in trouble, Argyle," he stated grimly. "The story broke in three different news sheets and two videocasts first thing this morning about the murder of Sigmund Grant—"

Continued on Page 124

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"But you said—"

"I know what I said," snapped Matheson. "I wasn't counting on our friend Dellora and the Traders. Every news sheet responsible is under Trader control through the ordinary stock and shares. Naturally, after that first edition, the other papers took up the story, and so did the video companies. Can't blame them I suppose."

Argyle felt a sudden panic sweep over him. "But how does that affect me?" he demanded.

"You're named as the murderer."

Argyle gaped at Matheson in horror.

"They quote secret sources," went on Matheson, "but they make it pretty plain that you are in the hands of the Law Squads and that your guilt is merely a matter for confirmation. We could slap an injunction on them, but it wouldn't do any good now that the cat's out of the bag."

"What else do they say?" demanded Argyle grimly.

"How do you mean?"

"Don't play tag, Matheson. I'm growing up in this rat race. What else is there? Dellora didn't just break the story for its news value, there's more to it than that."

Matheson pursed his lips and looked at the floor.

"Well?"

"It's not pretty. They're after your blood, Argyle. The first murder for profit in more than twenty years—"

"Profit?"

"Of course, Sigmund Grant was a dealer in jewellery. They're playing up the robbery angle and demanding that action be taken."

"What sort of action?"

"Immediate trial. Psycho treatment, long term of imprisonment as a lesson to others."

Argyle ran a hand through his hair in sheer bewilderment.

"But, dammit, Matheson, what's at the back of it?"

"They don't want you to see Preacher Judd."

"How the hell do they figure this will help?"

Matheson laughed ironically. "Don't be so damned naive. Do you think Judd would see you now? However badly he may want to it's more than he dare do, and Dellora and his pals know it."

Argyle felt fear plucking at him again, the same fear that had been with him on far too many occasions lately to be a stranger to him.

"You could fix it in secret—"

"Oh, for heavens sake ! Dellora has friends in high places, you can bet on that. Judd won't dare come within a hundred miles of you with things the way they are. What sort of story do you think that would make for the Trader controlled press ? Earth's Chief Minister keeps date with a murderer. They'd start asking questions—and giving the answers, or what pass for answers in the eye of Joe Public. Judd's position would be hopelessly compromised. When you were an unknown it was all right, even the murder couldn't hurt so long as it was kept quiet. Now, you're something of a celebrity in a negative sort of way, and Judd wouldn't dare have either a public or a secret interview with you."

Argyle sat white and shaken. Last night everything had seemed so simple. All he had to do was to see Armadeus Judd and everything would be all right. Now ? He was labelled as a murderer, and his name known to everyone who read a paper or watched a video screen.

"We get you off Earth—fast."

"What ?"

"I called Judd as soon as the news broke, and he decided that was the only thing to do. He daren't come within a hundred miles of London while you're here, and he agrees that the only thing we can do is get you off Earth and put someone in your place until the heat dies down."

"Who's going to be fool enough to sit in a cell in my place?"

Matheson chuckled. "Any Lawman who wants a quick promotion."

"Where shall I go ?"

"Rigel Five. I'll get a teepee hook-up with Sworder and tell him to look after you."

"What do I do. I can't keep running ?"

"You won't have to. Judd will come to Rigel Five in a few weeks as soon as he can fix it."

"The mountain and Mahommet, eh?" Argyle smiled wryly. "I just hope Dellora doesn't catch up with me again."

"He won't. There'll be two men with you every moment of the way to Rigel Five, and I don't think Dellora will want to advertise his abilities more than he has to."

"You said you spoke to Judd about me ?" Argyle looked at Matheson. "How did you convince him I was important

enough to take all this trouble over ? I don't mean anything to him."

Matheson looked at him sombrely. " I'll have to disillusion you on more than one point, Argyle. Judd does know about you. He seems to know more about you than I do. His reaction when I told him you were here, on Earth, showed that he considers you a very important person, and one whom we must take very great care of in the future." He nodded slowly. " Oh, yes, Judd knows you, Argyle, and he's been waiting to see you for a very long time.

He turned back to the visiphone.

" You'd better go and grab some food in the dining room while I'm fixing things up here. As soon as we can we'll get you aboard a ship for Rigel Five."

" A Trader ship ?"

Matheson glanced at him sardonically. " You're a big boy now, Argyle. We're laying on a Law Squad ship specially for you. Direct orders of Armadeus Judd."

Stunned, Argyle went slowly into the dining room. As he sat down at the table and sipped the steaming coffee he could hear Matheson's voice droning unintelligibly through the half closed door. Direct orders of Armadeus Judd ! He felt the fear run through him again and what slight appetite he had vanished under the feeling. Judd knew all about him, Matheson said. But what could he know ? Judd had been waiting to see him for a very long time. Why should Earth's Chief Minister be interested in a third-rate space engineer with a propensity for getting himself into trouble ? Somewhere the pieces were falling into place, but too many were still missing for him to be able to form a clear picture.

Old Pietro Dellora had known about him from Angela, and had wanted to see him. To offer him a job, as he had said ? Argyle doubted it very much in the light of later happenings. That had been a stop gap to keep him interested and to keep him near to Pietro while the old fat man had found out what he was really like. And then Alfredo had come hot-foot on the scene, and had found Argyle closeted with his father. He had assumed that Argyle knew Preacher Judd for some reason best known to himself, and the only way out of his immediate dilemma was to murder his own father.

For months Argyle had been caught in a web of mystery and intrigue that he didn't even begin to understand, and now that some glimmer of light was showing he realised that he was more

in the dark than he had been before. What had earlier seemed to be merely a mysterious personal vendetta between himself and Alfredo Dellora had developed into something much bigger. The Traders were involved, so too was Armadeus Judd. The Dellora Company and its successive heads—Pietro and Alfredo—were central figures.

So, too, was a scared, bewildered spaceman named Richard Argyle.

To be concluded

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